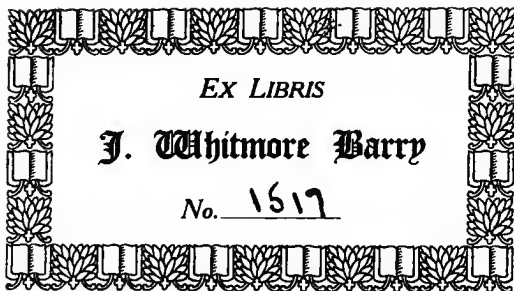


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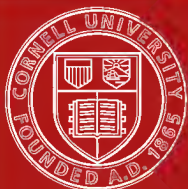
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*alter
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W. L. GEORGE

LONDON
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1912

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CONTENTS

PART I

	PAGE
I LA FAMILLE DUVERNOY	3
II PETIT DINER SANS CÉRÉMONIE	23
III PARIS LA NUIT	41
IV LE SPOR'	59
V L'AMOUR	82

PART II

I TOUR DE VALSE CHEZ MADAME BERNAY	111
II FACE À FACE	136
III BATAILLE	156
IV ARMISTICE	182
V PARIS-SUR-MER	206
VI VINGT-CINQ ANS	238

PART III

I TROIS ANS APRÈS	253
II LA FORTUNE	267
III DIPLOMATIE	293
IV ENCHAÎNÉ	313
V LA DÉBÂCLE	333

PART I

CHAPTER THE FIRST

LA FAMILLE DUVERNOY

I

"BUT do hurry, Marie," said Madame Duvernoy, "do you not see Monsieur Duvernoy has only just time to lunch!"

"I am hurrying, Madame, I am hurrying," replied Marie without animation. "Besides, what does it matter? Monsieur Duvernoy is always late."

Marie took the cover off the dish. A thin cloud of steam carried a strong smell of fried fish into the air.

"Ah, really, he is exasperating, *papa*," said a young man peevishly. He unfolded his napkin, laid it across his knees and placed upon the cloth his well-tended hands. The linen was fine, but had not the hard marble-like polish an English washerwoman alone can give it. It was not an elaborate table. Beyond the necessary spoons and knives and forks, it bore no bravery of plate, unless a silver bread basket and an unassuming cruet could be counted as such. A decanter of red wine stood at one end of the oval table by the side of a water jug, while at the other, near the vacant seat, was a salad bowl full of undressed salad. The dish now stood steaming on a plain rush mat; there was no table centre; there were no flowers, nor gleaming salt cellars, nor relays

of unnecessary spoons, which all tend to make in more ostentatious England a chorus for the leading dishes. Indeed, if one had not felt that all was good, the linen aged but hale, the plate tried, the fish deliciously yellow and gleaming, bathed on every side by a film of transparent butter, the effect would have been poor. As it was the meal seemed simple, devoid of affectations; indeed it had none, was more like a healthy child than a woman desirous of pleasing.

The room itself was at one with the table. A high brown china stove let into the wall and bound with copper bands radiated no heat that day, for April blew balmy; it served as a mantelpiece on which stood, between dark bronze vases, a delicate little gilt clock. On that clock languished a shepherdess overcome by megrims and the presence of a bowing marquis. The little clock struck twelve in a tinkling, faded voice, as if crushed by the solidity of the twentieth century, by the massive sideboard opposite. This was a towering mass of walnut, the base of which was crowded with pillars that grudgingly gave way to polished panels; it blazed with the goodly air of wood that wax and wear have yellowed. Above, behind two glass doors and shrouded by blue tulle curtains, could be seen a silver tea-set. At regular intervals round the room were marshalled chairs, the design of which followed that of the tiny colonnade above the sideboard. The suite was definitely the "Henri II suite"; no artist had honoured it with a thought, but it was the work of a good craftsman. A carpet of neutral tints allowed much of the glittering parquet floor to be seen, while across the yard, through the window curtains, appeared the kitchen of the neighbouring flat; fleeting shadows, a

maid, a butler with bushy whiskers, passed at times across the curtains. Down in the yard a dog barked shrilly, mingling his voice with the cries from the kitchen and the loud splashing noises made by a coachman as he washed his master's coupé.

"I told you so," remarked Marie, from the side.

"Ah, Monsieur Duvernoy, he is so agitated. . . ."

"That'll do, Marie," snapped Madame Duvernoy.

"Henri, go and tell your father. . . ."

But Monsieur Duvernoy had appeared, irrupted into the room. He came with a great air of business, a little grey man, already somewhat bald, with nervous hands and an agitated frown, as if he carried many cares and was inflated by their importance. He cast around him sharp blue eyes, restlessly twirled his grey moustache over his thin mouth; indeed he brought in with him an atmosphere of unrest, seemed spontaneously to disturb the quietude of his household's expectancy as if he were a transient puff of wind blowing open a door that was ajar. But all of him was in himself, uncorrelated with his surroundings. He was a desperately busy little man, desperately intent upon some minor task, like an ant who with tiny muscles hugely tugs at a microscopic egg. He sat down at the table, seized his napkin and tucked it into his collar.

"Never ready, never ready," he grumbled.

"Well, I like that. . . . But, *papa*. . . . Oh, *Monsieur*," burst from the aggrieved parties.

"And you know I only have half-an-hour," snapped Monsieur Duvernoy.

"Oh, you'll have time enough. Monsieur Bernay can wait," said Madame Duvernoy. "It'll give him a higher idea of your value. He'll say: 'This Monsieur

Duvernoy, he is overloaded, people tear him from one another's hands.' Besides, it's true, *mon ami*."

Monsieur Duvernoy smiled at the gentle flattery, not with the benignity of the amiable cynic who watches himself being managed, but widely, as if acknowledging a palatable truth. He had, when he smiled, a pleasant thin face, and his eyes were agreeably blue.

"I suppose you are going to settle the business," remarked Henri.

"Very likely," said his father. He had suddenly grown curt; the intervention of his sedate son was as unwelcome as his wife's was natural. He had no respect for him, though he was armed with full degrees and already earned a salary in a solicitor's office. "All well at the *étude*?"

"*Oui, papa*," said Henri meekly, "but it's not very amusing."

"Well, my child, you're not in the law to amuse yourself," said Madame Duvernoy, with a touch of acerbity. "You must be *sérieux*, you must make yourself a position. You young men, you think of nothing but pleasure."

She cast a stern look at the young man, but her rather domineering mouth relaxed and something very soft seemed to mix with the sternness. She watched him, thinking how nicely he ate, how trim his hands were, how well the English tailor's new suit fitted a figure which in parts was a little rotund. At last she summed him up as a very handsome young man. Henri sat, slightly snubbed, his underlip protruding a little as would that of a pouting child. He was neither tall nor short, broad-shouldered, rather ungainly, perhaps, about the hips. He had an open

kindly face, with astonished blue eyes, eyebrows too faint to throw a shade over their slight prominence; his nose was straight, rather thick, as was also his red full mouth. Henri's mouth was Henri: it was so healthy, so fresh, girlish almost, and girlish too in its pleasant irresolute curves which a thin thread of golden moustache did not entirely virilise. His light-brown hair waved away from his broad forehead with a regularity that suggested cosmetics.

"You are wearing your new suit, Henri," remarked Madame Duvernoy. "Certainly it is a success, isn't it, Jules?"

Monsieur Duvernoy looked up from his plate and pretended to consider Henri with immense care.

"*Pas mal, pas mal*," he said ironically, "Monsieur is the dandy of the office. You should have been a costumier, Henri, not a grave lawyer." Monsieur Duvernoy's thin face changed as he grew sardonic. The blue eyes were steelier than his son's; the grey moustache curled with his lip.

Henri blushed; his parents' attentions embarrassed him. This new suit . . . he had heard a lot about this new suit that very morning. No doubt it was quite the thing, but ought he to wear grey tweed with a stiff white shirt? He had a vague idea that this was not English; still it was difficult to find anybody to ask. And cuffs, too. He had read somewhere that in England they did not wear detachable cuffs.

"Oh yes," he said at length, with a great air of carelessness, "not bad. But I think I ought to have my cuffs and shirts all of one piece."

"All of one piece!" cried Madame Duvernoy. "But, Henri, you would not be able to wear them more than a day! How can you be so extravagant!"

"Well, they do so in England," said Henri obstinately, "and it's always foggy there."

"You can give me some fillet, Marthe," interrupted Monsieur Duvernoy, "when you have done with the toilet of *Monsieur le Comte d'Orsay*."

The rapid lunch was hurried on. Marie had served the fillet with a sacerdotal air. It was perfectly brown, vivid pink when cut, surrounded by the sluggish gravy, the mystery of which is butter; little lumps of butter stood upon it here and there, crowned with chopped charvel, like tiny grass-grown rocks. Monsieur Duvernoy bolted his portion, and compelled Marie to hurry forth the sweet.

"But, Monsieur," protested Marie, "not so quickly. You will give yourself an indigestion."

Monsieur Duvernoy won, however, swallowed without wincing the little cup of boiling coffee, tore his napkin from his collar, went to his wife, kissed her cheek and ran out of the room. His spare little figure vanished with a flap of flying coat-tails; the door banged behind him. His nervous footsteps could be heard upon the parquet of the hall; he seemed to push chairs, to drop his walking-stick; his voice could faintly be heard anathematising Marie and Charlotte because his hat was lost; Marie responded virulently.

II

"Ah, Henri," sighed Madame Duvernoy, "what a man! what activity! you would not think he was fifty-two."

"No," said Henri, "I'm glad I'm not like that."

I've got some time left, so much the better; give me another cup of coffee."

Madame Duvernoy looked at him darkly.

"It's not good for you, Henri," she said, "it's bad for your nerves."

"Oh, my nerves are all right," laughed Henri. Certainly the suggestion that this big Belgian-looking youth suffered from nerves was rather ridiculous. Madame Duvernoy smiled at the music of her boy's laugh and poured him out a cup of coffee: she had a delicious sense of sin when she spoiled him.

"Well," she said, "since you're not in a hurry, you can stay and talk with your mother even if she is a lady of a certain age."

"*Oui, maman,*" said Henri. He glanced affectionately at the "lady of a certain age." This age was forty-five, but Madame Duvernoy did not look it. She was short, dark-skinned, with good bright-brown eyes; her short nose and pointed chin gave her an air of vivacity. Obviously she had been very pretty, piquante, and now, though the plenitudes of her figure and the thickened lines of her cheeks had robbed her of youthfulness, she remained very erect, flat-backed, square-shouldered; she suggested powerful stays coping successfully with their task, well-tied laces and clothes where every hook, button and pin did their work well. But for her thin mouth, which was pretty when it showed her small white teeth, but hardened suddenly when it closed, Madame Duvernoy would have been the well-preserved *bourgeoise* and no more.

"You know," she said, "you should not be so English, Henri, when your father is here. He does not like England,"

"Well, it's not my fault," replied Henri. "England's the fashion. Everybody dresses in the English style now. And everywhere you see English bars and English furniture, and English girls at the music-halls."

"Yes, I know," said Madame Duvernoy, "but your father's political views . . ."

"Ah, *oui*, Fashoda, I know," laughed Henri. "He is a reactionary, *papa*. That's very *chic*."

Madame Duvernoy looked displeased. She was not the one Frenchwoman in a hundred thousand who knows the difference between a *Républicain de Gauche* and a *Républicain Progressiste*: she merely knew that the world had but recently emerged from the hideous period of the Dreyfus case, during which every other dinner-party ended in a violent disturbance.

"I wish you would leave politics alone," she said, with an imperative note in her voice. "They do you a lot of harm. One might think you had forgotten that awful quarrel last year at our dinner-party and the duel in which the vicomte was hit in . . ."

"*Oui, oui, maman*, I know," said Henri, fearing the ancient story. "However, you know my ideas: there are lots of *Socialistes* in the best circles, and if I can't be a *Radical* . . . after all, I've got a vote."

"Yes," said Madame Duvernoy, "but why did you tell your father you voted for the *Radical*? I don't say it matters who you vote for; these *députés* are all *canailles*."

Henri said nothing in reply. He vaguely believed that the *Radical* was an honest man, while everybody knew that the *Nationaliste* candidate had been compromised in the Panama affair, and some said he had been a *Boulangiste* and had sold his leader. Still,

it was all very difficult; perhaps his mother was right. He felt annoyed, got up, went to the window and drummed on the window-panes.

"I should like to be a *député*," he said at length.

"Henri, don't be ridiculous," cried the mother; "why, think of the risks if you weren't re-elected. Twenty-five francs a day won't carry you very far. Though," she added reflectively, "they're talking of increasing their salary."

She surveyed for a moment the broad back of her sulky child, then, vaguely remorseful, followed him to the window. The house had a spaciousness of view that is rare in Paris. A third of the horizon was taken up by the back of the opposite house, into whose every kitchen the Duvernoys' glances inevitably plunged whenever they looked out of the dining-room window. As Henri's eyes wandered across the yard he saw all that remained of his childhood, the old skewbald mare which drew the coupé of the Comtesse de Charnac, the window where there used to appear on Sundays the dark uniform of a boarder from the Lycée Lakanal, the elderly butler with the bushy whiskers who had known him as a baby boy. The butler had become an old friend, though they had never spoken: for twenty years he had exchanged nods and smiles with him, seen his whiskers grow greyer and bushier. Under the window ran a lane which led to a horse-dealer's yard; upon its rough stones Henri had for years heard the rhythmic clank of iron-shod hoofs as the horses were exercised while he wrote out his tasks. Beyond the lane lay a vast yard, where the municipality had piled cartloads of paving stones, thousands of brooms, water carts; in the middle of the yard, between two heaps of gravel, grew a colossal chestnut

tree. It stood stranded in the midst of municipal activities; it might have been fifty years old and was untouched: the City of Paris tolerated it among its road metal; indeed the council had provided a little fence to protect its earth. Now, in the soft sunshine of April, a sweeper stood at its foot looking up at it while his deft fingers negligently rolled a cigarette.

"Look, Henri," said Madame Duvernoy, "his leaves have come."

"*Oui, maman,*" said Henri. "He is late this year, ten days late."

The tree reared up its gaunt black trunk; here and there upon its bare branches flickered tiny green leaves, still curling and moist, full still of the spirit of life. They were just born, and now they were shrinking from contact with the air. The sight stirred Henri; for the twentieth time he was seeing the prodigy, the ever young tree bringing forth a cloud of green jewels, promising the sumptuous crop of its flowers, great regular red cones. He struggled to find a simile, failed, felt that he was not literary. Then his mother broke in—

"It's a fine view, Henri."

"*Oui, maman,*" he replied. Madame Duvernoy had said this before; she had said it a hundred times. Still, it was a fine view. Beyond the yard and the chestnut lay the low tiled roof of a builder's workshop; beyond that the backs of the high houses of the Rue François Ier; beyond, the open western sky cleft in two by the monstrous spear of the Eiffel Tower two miles away. On summer evenings a pageant unrolled in front of this window; the kitchens unashamedly flaunted washed garments drying in the wind, while the red flowers of the chestnut tree blazed

like Christmas candles; over all the red light would set, gilding the tiles of the workshop, painting one side of the Eiffel Tower with fire while the other remained black.

"Henri," said Madame Duvernoy suddenly, "you didn't mean that about being a *député*, did you? You know . . . of course, it's a very good position, but so uncertain."

"I don't know, *maman*," said Henri doubtfully.

"Well, your father and I would never allow it . . . you must stick to your work at the *étude* and in five or six years we'll find you a nice girl to marry, a girl with a little money, and buy you your solicitor's practice."

"*Oui, maman*," said Henri faintly. He was overwhelmed, he felt powerless. Forces were seizing him, making a solicitor of him, marrying him to a nice girl with a little money, chaining him up in his practice. Still, he saw no reason to resist; his dreams were vague, too vague to protect him against the French social system.

Madame Duvernoy looked at him rather anxiously. She was half disappointed not to hear him protest, so ready was she to fight, to grind down his opposition; she wanted to mould him, curb him, crush him, and then heal his wounds, cover him with caresses. She slipped her hand through his arm.

"You're quite happy, Henri?" she asked gently.

"*Oui, maman*," replied the son in a toneless voice. Then he regained his self-possession. "I must go now," he said, "it's getting late."

Madame Duvernoy detained him a second, smiling with her mouth but watching him with her hard, dark eyes.

"Well, kiss me," she said. And as he kissed her she gave a happy sigh of restored security.

III

The Duvernoys had lived in the flat in the Rue de Marignan for twenty-five years. There Jules Duvernoy, a young barrister of twenty-seven, had brought Marthe, his pretty dark bride of twenty. He had married Marthe Lacour, or rather had been told off to take charge of her after protracted negotiations between his father, old Émile Duvernoy, and Monsieur Lacour, who had made his fortune as a wholesale ironmonger in the Faubourg St. Antoine. Monsieur Lacour's shop, for shop it was in spite of its large dealings, was then known to all Paris as "Aux Fers de France." Monsieur Lacour came up to Paris from Provence eight years after Louis Napoleon became Emperor; in those days his possessions were two hundred and twenty francs, a rosary, a scapulary, an old amethyst brooch which had belonged to his grandmother, a housemaid in the service of Mirabeau, and an inexhaustible store of optimism. The latter enabled him to expand from the selling of pots and pans to dealings in pig-iron; when the war came in 1870 Monsieur Lacour nearly doubled his small fortune by a timely importation of English and, said rumour, German rifles for the *francs-tireurs* and the *mobiles*. The war profited him so well that 1880 saw him selling pins, needles and tacks, importing boilers and railway plant. He was a made man, but long before Monsieur Lacour had soared above his class: his little girl, Marthe, was a pupil of the Oiseaux, his son, educated

by the Fathers, was a friend of the young Marquis de Salma-Valens, and, forgetting his grandmother, Mirabeau's housemaid, showed his contempt for the ten-year-old Third Republic by entering the crack dragoons.

It was not without some searchings of heart that old Émile Duvernoy and his wife had received Lacour's advances. True, he was rich, which the Duvernoys were not, but theirs was a long line of lawyers extending, it was said, as far back as the days of Colbert, when a Duvernoy once held a brief for Madame de Sévigné. Another Duvernoy—a royalist judge this—had fled to England with the *émigrés* and founded in Kent the family now known as Dauburnays. All through their history the Duvernoys had married exclusively either distant connections or the seed of the law. No Duvernoy had ever made a fortune, but no Duvernoy had ever condescended to marry either a "corrupt noble," as the Radical Émile Duvernoy would have said, or *de la canaille*, as his son Jules Duvernoy contradictorily put it. Émile Duvernoy had been Monsieur Lacour's solicitor, and the old tradesman, delighted by the good appearance of young Duvernoy, the ancient legal smack of his name, had practically forced Marthe upon him, together with a *dot* of five hundred thousand francs.

Jules Duvernoy did not love Marthe, though, let it be said to his honour, he desired her *dot* no more than he did her. He had no fortune, but he knew that no Duvernoy could fail at the Bar: the name was a goodwill. Still, he was twenty-seven, and had had his fling for ten years; Marthe was a tradesman's daughter, shy, gauche, but the Oiseaux had not taken from

her eye an attractive gladness; she had a figure which would pay for dressing.

"*Eh, mon ami,*" said his father at length, "*il faut faire une fin.*"

Jules Duvernoy had made an end, married Marthe and her fifteen thousand francs a year, taken from his father another five thousand, and opened a more imposing office in the Rue d'Aguesseau. He had lived, or rather life had passed, accompanied only by events which leave no mark because they are expected. Old Émile Duvernoy died a few months after the wedding; then Henri was born, the co-heir with his uncle, the dashing Capitaine Lacour, of the fortune of the "Fers de France." But Henri was not to inherit millions. The tariff of 1882 dealt a terrible blow at Monsieur Lacour's business; this he tried to counteract by speculating in copper and joining the "corner." The collapse of the "corner" brought the "Fers de France" to the ground; then tragic events accumulated upon one another: the old Lacours were one morning found dead in their bed, suffocated by gas—accidentally; said the papers; a fortnight later Capitaine Lacour, faced by a reduction of his income from three thousand francs a month to his captain's pay, shot himself dead through the palate. The younger son was sent to Algeria, almost penniless, to plant alfalfa.

Marthe Duvernoy had wept when her father, mother and brother successively passed out of life accompanied by every circumstance of defeat and disgrace, but her griefs seemed every one to vanish whenever she took out of his cot her rosy, fat Henri—later when she took him herself by the hand, in his English sailor-suit, to the "Cours" of Mademoiselle Bimart in the Rue Marbeuf. All through his childhood Henri felt

the surrounding presence of his mother; it was his mother washing him relentlessly, his mother hearing his Catechism, his mother passing a cool hard hand over his forehead as he lay in bed, and dosing him, if she thought him feverish, with water in which was dissolved a lump of sugar flavoured with a few drops of *fleur d'oranger*. She loved him with the fierce love of a woman who has had no husband, but has merely lived with a man less strange than others and by him had a child. Jules Duvernoy had disappointed the dreams she nursed when she secretly read a novel at the Oiseaux, under cover of a dictionary and the lid of her desk. He had the dryness, the causticity of his legal line; because his forefathers had been barristers, solicitors or judges, he seemed to have been born stiff, logical—his blood did not flow sluggishly, no more did it race; he had married Marthe, given her an adequate flat, left her a fair share of her own income for her clothes, made enough at the bar to maintain her. His task was done. Their budget was never in jeopardy, for Monsieur Duvernoy earned on an average thirty-five thousand francs a year; this brought up their joint income to fifty thousand francs a year, twenty-five thousand of which kept up their household. Five thousand francs a year were allowed to Mademoiselle Ravier, an aunt of Monsieur Duvernoy, and to two elderly Lacour cousins whose *dot* had gone in the copper crash, which made their marriage impossible. Twenty thousand francs a year were saved for the unlikely rainy day or the time when Jules Duvernoy would want to retire from his work.

Free from cares, therefore, Madame Duvernoy had nothing to think of except Henri. He was her life; he even pervaded her sleep, for the memory of her

duty acted upon her more powerfully than an alarm clock: often Henri, then a boy of fourteen, felt some one shake him by the shoulder at half-past six. He would awake, see his mother in a loose wrapper, her hair roughly coiled up, a book in her hand.

"Now, Henri," she would whisper, "wake up. Your English recitation—you must say it . . . you have time now."

Henri would sit up, rub his sleepy eyes, then obediently gather his wits together and recite—

"To bay orr nott to bay . . .
Zat is ze questchoun . . .
Wezzer tis noblerr in zer . . . in zer . . ."

"Inn zer meend . . ."

"*Non*, in zer maind . . ." Henri corrected. . . .

And late at night, too, his mother was by his bedside, placing his algebra where the morning sun would catch it, whispering into his ears to remember he had to tint a geometrical design. Sometimes, as he slept, she would kneel by his bedside and pray to a God she did not believe in for herself, but who must exist to protect Henri . . . sometimes, too, for trivial faults, she would beat him cruelly, leaving wales upon his back . . . for she could have killed him to make him perfect, this boy she loved.

IV

Henri Duvernoy had not far to go to reach the *étude*, for this was an old-fashioned solicitor's office—an office inherited, passed on, solid as a rock. He had only had to walk the short length of the Rue de Marignan, cross the Rue François I^{er}, and then follow the line

of the ancient chestnut trees of the Avenue Montaigne to arrive at his place of business. The *étude* was ruled, according to the secular laws of the profession, by a white-haired *avoué*; it was established in one of the great houses inspired by the spirit of Haussmann. Its height suggested the length of the town planner's immense avenues, for it reared its massive frontage of six storeys aloft, simple in lines but ornate in decoration; two crushed stone giants bore the first-floor balcony and its heavy wrought-iron balustrade. Above, other balconies continued the rhythm with less decorative emphasis; the windows were all high, the porch broad, its two doors so ponderous that the *concierger* had himself to close them at night, for they were too heavy for his wife. The *étude* was on the first floor, but nothing revealed its existence save a black, octagonal plate, bearing in golden letters the words, "Berquin, Avoué."

Henri was not in a hurry, for a quarter of an hour remained of the hour and a half during which the office was every day closed to enable the clerks to go home and lunch. He was disturbed, agitated almost; not that his parents' intentions were new to him, but they seemed that day to oppress him, to echo in his brain as if expressed by destiny. He reflectively posted a letter at the post office at the corner of the Champs Elysées, surveyed carelessly their wide prospect, the *Kiosque* where the old newspaper woman sat, a bundle of shawls, with her feet on a little charcoal stove, the white café opposite where now some coachmen in ochre trousers and hard white hats sat over odorous stews, the gay windows of the English chemist full of packed patent medicines. The Champs Elysées were almost deserted, for it was close on half-

past one; a few empty cabs crawled up the hill towards the distant Arc de Triomphe; a maid with tightly drawn black hair and a rigid white apron ran across from refuge to refuge followed by a prancing, curled, bejewelled poodle. Then he retraced his steps along the street, meditatively examining the bowls of coffee beans at the grocer's, the chemist's blue and red bottles, the little *Bar Anglais* where the grooms and ostlers gossiped and laid bets with the men from the horse-dealer's in the lane.

Henri Duvernoy's thoughts did not amount to very much. They were never rapid or revolutionary; indeed they were the thoughts that might be expected from his rather heavy but good-natured face. As he walked, a little ponderously and swaying somewhat on his bulky hips, one had the impression of another Henri Duvernoy aged not twenty-four but forty-four. The shape was clothed in decent black, distinctly fat, especially in the face, where the cheeks were touched with rosacia; the golden moustache had gone a dull mouse-colour, and joined up with a darker-grey-streaked beard. In its dull eyes could be seen acquiescence. Henri Duvernoy was acquiescence itself. He had done his work at school, where he was always punctual and obeyed his masters, done his home-work well, taken every year a first prize and two second prizes, together with one or two stray *accessits*; then he had attended his course at La Sorbonne; as time passed he became *licencié*, then *docteur* in the law. A year's military service separated the degrees, a year of dull exercises, aimless marching, cleaning—ah! cleaning. Cleaning rifles and floors, and yards and leather, and white gaiters and brass buttons. Then, life, his father's intimation that after all he had decided

that a career at the Bar was too uncertain to be suitable for an apparently tongue-tied youth, and that he was to be an *avoué* for whom, ultimately, a secure practice would be bought.

As Henri slowly walked down the street, small for Paris though as broad as the main thoroughfares of London, he heaved a sigh and then threw away his Maryland cigarette. He was vaguely conscious of the extraordinary flatness of his life. Nothing happened, or rather the things that happened were as expected as if he were still following at school the engraved *emploi du temps*. He had not the soul of an adventurer, so was inarticulate to himself: he did not know what element was lacking in this life of his, which he knew lacked one. He did not know that there was a poetry at the bottom of his uncomplex soul which romance alone could satisfy. Henri had unconsciously sought romance in women, but had not found it. He had not the temperament which creates it, the enterprise which discovers it. Like most young Frenchmen of his age he had little to learn of sex and everything to learn of love; his adventures, when he recalled them at all, were unworthy of the name, so brutish and material were they. For a Frenchman he was backward, as shyness and vague fears had forbidden him to do more than glance from the corners of his eyes at the beauties who languish in open cabs in the minor alleys of the Bois de Boulogne. The regiment introduced him to the coarser realities which purported to be the equivalents of the love promised in novels. Henri was disillusioned in a few months; his mind was amazed to find no answer to the question: What, is this all?

He retained enough freshness, though, to believe

that women still promised felicity. He would have given much to be dashing, to kill among the ranks of the wives of barristers and notaries who came to his mother's Wednesdays; he would have been happy if he had been quite sure that the English tailor's suit fitted, to be able to talk of Mirabeau's last book, Lavedan's last play, the pictures at the *Indépendants*. He did his best, saw to it that his nails were manicured, his sharp-pointed boots polished; he read Pierre Louys and vaguely realised that it was fine but "thick"; he sometimes dressed in his "smoking" to go out alone in the evening so as to get used to mundane manners. Still, all this training, this aching for something, left him face to face with the recurrence of dull tasks, dull days, a future with a heavy lead-coloured sky in which there was no rift.

Henri heaved another sigh and turned into the dark porch of the *étude* Berquin.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

PETIT DINER SANS CÉRÉMONIE

I

"BUT, Jules," said Madame Duvernoy, "I don't see why we should give them a dinner. We don't know them very well, and they haven't asked us yet. Besides, people say that Monsieur Bernay . . ."

"People say, people say," said her husband acidly, "*ma chère amie*, really you have no business sense. I know quite well that Bernay is not everything that could be desired, but I . . . I have my reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Oh, business reasons," said Monsieur Duvernoy reluctantly. Then he decided to give his wife his confidence, as usual, for he had no professional secrets where she was concerned. "The fact is, I know privately that Bernay is in difficulties with the Turkish Government about that Damascus railway. There's no knowing what will happen."

"I don't see . . ."

"Oh," exploded Monsieur Duvernoy, "you are ridiculous, Marthe; don't you see that there will be a big lawsuit? It'll last a long time, a year at least. His barrister will make Heaven knows what out of it. Now do you understand?" A pettish expression came over his face; his small hands clenched nervously.

Madame Duvernoy drew herself up,

"Jules," she said, "you are annoying, you expect everybody to guess what you mean. If you had said you had business reasons I would . . ."

"If I had said!" shouted Monsieur Duvernoy; "why don't you listen when I talk . . ."

"Now, Jules, don't agitate yourself. Let me see, the Bernays have a daughter, we must ask her. Yes, and Mézin of course. We want a woman too."

"Mademoiselle de Morenda," suggested Monsieur Duvernoy, twirling his grey moustache.

"No," said Madame Duvernoy firmly, "I know one can ask *la petite Morenda* without her mother to lunch, but not to dinner. It is not the thing. No, we must ask Madame Sarlat-Cohen."

"I hate Jews," sniffed Monsieur Duvernoy.

"She is not a Jewess, she married a Catholic—at least, he became a Catholic. Besides, you forget her party wall dispute."

"Bother her party wall. Those cases are more trouble than they are worth."

"Jules! how can you refuse cases! Besides, she is a third cousin of Baron de Galgenstein. You never know what it will lead to."

"Oh, all right, have Madame Sarlat-Cohen if you must. It's your dinner, not mine. Mind, the entrées are to come from Gloppe, not from the baker."

Monsieur Duvernoy left the room, colliding with his son at the door. Henri found his mother coupling names on a used envelope, scratching them out and putting them in again with a great air of concentration. She was clearly solving a business problem.

"*À propos, Henri,*" she said; "we are having a little dinner next Friday. You will please arrange to

be in. The Bernays and their daughter will be asked."

"Oh!" said Henri without any show of interest.

II

Though the dinner was timed for half-past seven the Duvernoy men did not come home before ten-past. They had every reason to keep away from the flat, for little dinners in their small establishment meant domestic convulsions from which they usually suffered. The convulsions had begun the day before, when Madame Duvernoy had sat in the kitchen between Marie and Eugénie, the cook, "*La Cuisine Bourgeoise*" open before them. There had even been a heated altercation between the partners, for Madame Duvernoy had tried to suppress the entrée.

"*Mais, Eugénie*, it's only a little dinner, quite *en famille*."

"Madame cannot do without an entrée," said Eugénie firmly. "Madame must have little birds."

"I see," said Madame Duvernoy, "you want your sou in the franc."

Eugénie blushed bright red. She was furious, for Madame Duvernoy spoke the truth; her plan was to have as costly a menu as possible so as to reap that halfpenny in the franc which is the Parisian cook's perquisite.

"As Madame likes," she said icily. "If Madame is not pleased, I will return my apron to her."

This storm, however, and many others, subsided. All through Friday the flat was filled with scents of cooking; little boys in spotless pastrycook dress

thundered at the back-stairs door; the *petit salon* lost its sofa, which was forced into Henri's little room, so as to give the ladies an impression of size when they took off their wraps. A few minutes after seven Madame Duvernoy arranged with her own hands the visiting-cards in the silver tray in the hall, so as to place *en évidence* those of the Comtesse de Balazan and of Mr. Jacob Mahlstein, *Officier de la Légion d'Honneur*. An atmosphere of excitement pervaded the whole flat; noises in every corner blended together; Madame Duvernoy in her dressing-room screamed for hot water, Marie ran wildly through the corridors, carrying flowers in one hand and a tray cloth in another, while the voice of Eugénie could be heard from the kitchen raised in heated altercation with Charlotte and the hired waiter.

The Duvernoy men had little to do on their arrival, for the concentration of the household took place not on appearances, but on the dinner itself. Everybody had been asked *en famille*, so that dress was prohibited; thus the men were spared the "smoking" they only put on under great pressure. Still, Madame Duvernoy was *en demi-toilette*, in a slightly décolleté mauve tussore which set off her still youthful neck. The men rapidly changed into frock-coats, but Monsieur Duvernoy rather spoiled the effect by retaining his soiled boots. As for Henri his frock-coat caught him under the arms and compelled him to remember it all the time.

At last the family was assembled in the drawing-room a few minutes before the half-hour. The dining-room of the Duvernoys was so much behind the times as to be rather up to date. Most of its furniture came from Jules Duvernoy's grandfather, and had

been bought at intervals between the days of the Directoire and those of Louis XVIII. There were many stiff hard chairs in black or brown wood, with plain covers and metal ornaments on their arms, legs and backs; an oval marble table standing on four legs bore in plain massive gilt frames the languishing picture of an ancestress; an atrocious chiffonier, covered with brackets and mirrors, carried a curious hotch-potch, wooden Chinese figures, Dresden china, bits of Sèvres and Swiss cow bells; one side of the room was almost entirely monopolised by a long sideboard in black polished wood, covered with inlay and wrongly attributed to Buhl, while in the middle of the room stood the long and massive couch with the straight side and curved end with which Ingres and his like have made us familiar. Still, there was no undue severity in the room, for the carpet was a thick red felt masked by Turkish rugs, while the walls seemed gay because they were white and profusely decorated with gildings. The Duvernoys had no notions about art, which saved them from grave lapses: the only pictures were a small Daubigny, a bad portrait of old Émile Duvernoy, two water-colours of Venice, which might have been worse, and an oil of which Monsieur Duvernoy boasted as a Corot. It was not a Corot, it was a Trouillebert; but Monsieur Duvernoy, who had been swindled, did not know it and liked to think that it had cost him four thousand francs.

When Mézin was announced Madame Duvernoy was in trouble, the *fruits rafraîchis* not having arrived. She was seated on the couch under the heavy brass chandelier. This could hold forty candles, and was always kept filled but seldom lighted; never, so far

as Henri remembered, had the forty candles been lit. He vaguely remembered having once counted twenty flames, but this must have been long ago, for it seemed to have taxed his counting powers. As a rule the candles remained unused up to the summer, during the heat of which they slowly heeled over and disconsolately hung head downwards. On that night ten candles diffused their gentle light over Madame Duvernoy's dark hair and plump, creamy neck. As Mézin entered, announced by the excited and perspiring Marie, whose apron absolutely crackled, so stiff were its folds, there was a little rush of the three Duvernoys, a fierce mingling of four voices warring for supremacy.

"Ah, *cette chère Madame Duvernoy*," said Mézin at length, gallantly planting a kiss on the back of his hostess's hand.

"Monsieur Mézin! now do be reasonable. My husband will be jealous. It would be terrible."

"Terrible, terrible," growled Monsieur Duvernoy, with a smile. "Mézin, I shall challenge you."

Mézin laughed, searched his mind in vain for a repartee, then turned to Henri.

"Ah, Henri, my boy! Well, how are things at the *étude*?"

"Very well, very well," said Henri vaguely.

"Good, good, very good. Fine weather, *hein*, Duvernoy?"

Mézin was a heavy man of forty-five; he was fat, rather bald, and suggested by sheer shortness, breadth and rotundity, a tobacco jar. He wore dark-brown whiskers and a thick moustache, but his chin showed blackish and badly shaven. His trousers were baggy at the knees, his waistcoat much creased and

extremely tight, while his round, detachable cuffs continually shot out from his short sleeves.

Monsieur Duvernoy was vainly trying to create animation in Mézin's heavy mind, when Madame Sarlat-Cohen was announced. This lady had begun life as Rachel Meyer, married a Cohen who became *sous-préfet* at Sarlat, buried her husband in the odour of Catholic sanctity, and returned from his district with the prefix "Sarlat." Madame Sarlat-Cohen was fifty-five, and often looked forty-five. She had been very pretty and still had good brown eyes, but her swarthy flesh had pouched over the cheekbones and fatally allowed the jaws to mark her cheeks.

"Well, *ma chère Marthe*, who are your charming guests to-night?" Madame Sarlat-Cohen toyed with her fan. Her hands were very fat and as broad as they were long; rings of flesh formed over the thick wrists.

"Oh, nobody, nobody, quite a little dinner, the . . ." Madame Duvernoy stopped the space of a second. She felt her dear friend remembering that she had seen the tussore dress before, saw her glance at the ten candles. Aggressiveness crept into her soul. "The Bernays," she added, "you know, the great financier. He is on the Bourse. Have you met him?"

A sly look came over Madame Sarlat-Cohen's face. The three men were at the other end of the room, before the pseudo Corot. "Marthe," she whispered, "you know Loulou Lamirale, of the Folichon Palace? Well, I hear that Bernay . . ."

Confused whispers, giggles, Duvernoy's voice—

"*Oui*, my old Mézin, four thousand francs for a Corot. . . ."

Then the bell, Madame Duvernoy and Madame Sarlat-Cohen separated; the men hurried back to the centre of the room. For a second the hostess forgot the missing *fruits rafraîchis*. Then black-eyed Charlotte opened the door—

"*Monsieur, Madame et Mademoiselle Bernay.*"

"*Ah, Madame, pardon, we are late . . .*"

"*Not at all, not at all, au contraire . . .*"

"*Bonsoir, Bernay, ah! this is Mademoiselle Suzanne. . .*" Quickly Mézin and Madame Sarlat-Cohen were introduced to the newcomers. With some skill Madame Duvernoy divided the party, appropriating Bernay for herself, while her husband showed Madame Bernay the Corot. Mézin and Madame Sarlat-Cohen were holding a little private conversation, most of which fell to the woman, while Henri and Suzanne, both shy and exceedingly anxious to please, allowed their idle glances to rove pitifully. Henri felt all the more embarrassed because Suzanne struck him as very pretty. She was petite, slim of shoulder and arm, but already an agreeable plenitude was promised by her figure. On her rather long neck her small head sat delightfully pert. Her skin was dead white, flushing very red at the lips; her nose was short, the slightest bit tip-tilted. But it was her eyes that Henri looked at furtively. For they were big and velvety black, but not sleepy as southern eyes often are; indeed, they were bright, rather defiant, and there was charming artifice in the demureness that veiled them with black lashes. The faintest down shaded her short upper lip. She looked at Henri with more assurance than he could muster in reply. She rather liked this big fair boy.

III

"Yes, yes, Madame," said Monsieur Duvernoy absently.

"But you do not understand; not only does my neighbour erect chicken coops against it, but he is putting a wire fence on the top."

"Abominable, *chère Madame*," cried Mézin, "you must pull it down."

"Hum, hum!" said Monsieur Duvernoy; "be careful, the party wall law is tricky. . . ."

"Not so tricky as the Stock Exchange law," said Bernay. His was a cold incisive voice. Madame Bernay looked at him wistfully. They were a curious faded couple these Bernays, faded like badly renovated furniture. There was a drawn look about Madame Bernay's eyes; the lines on her forehead seemed to balance the two vertical wrinkles right and left of her husband's mouth. They looked tired, as if they had been struggling for a long time. True Bernay was very neat and wore a heavy gold chain, while his wife's dress was new and smart, her hands covered with rings. Still, there was weariness in the woman's face, bitterness in the man's. And bitterness when a man is forty-five is a form of weariness.

"Ah, you are right!" said Monsieur Duvernoy; "believe me, we in the legal profession, we know what *canailles* people are!"

"*Parbleu*," said Mézin, "we should be poor men if it wasn't for you financiers."

A ripple of laughter ran round the table, while Mézin remained open-mouthed in presence of his

success; he did not in the least realise the delicacy of his innuendo.

Henri and Suzanne sat side by side, almost unobserved, for now Madame Sarlat-Cohen had completely engulfed Monsieur Duvernoy and was burying him under the ruins of her party wall. Bernay sat moodily stripping from the trout its delicate speckled skin, while Madame Duvernoy shared with Madame Bernay the task of finding Mézin amusing. Suzanne ate daintily, almost affectedly. Henri, who had said nothing while the soup was on the table, found himself hypnotised by the play of the white fingers and rosy nails on the silver fork. At last he summoned some courage.

"I hear you are fond of music, Mademoiselle."

The dark eyes were raised, then quickly veiled by the long lashes.

"*Oui, Monsieur.*"

"I too; at least I go to the Opéra sometimes."

"Yes?" said Suzanne. "We have some friends, the Scholteins; they sometimes take me in their box. Last night I was at *Tristan et Yseult*. You know the Liebestod, of course."

"Oh, of course," said Henri. This was untrue, so he prudently tried to change the subject. "You know, though, I can't pretend to be a *connaisseur*."

Suzanne said nothing, but remained with her hands crossed in her lap, while Henri shifted uneasily in his chair; that frock-coat was gripping him under the arms.

Madame Duvernoy looked at Charlotte anxiously, but the maid's face did not move. Those *fruits rafraîchis* were missing. Awful.

"*Délicieux, délicieux,*" said Bernay suddenly.

"Madame, you have a wonderful cook." He raised upon his fork a swollen olive.

"*Oh, Monsieur,*" simpered his hostess, "quite a simple dish."

"Not at all," said Mézin, "it looks to me beautifully complicated."

The entrée was truly a wonderful thing: *poussins aux olives*. The tiny chicks were stuffed with olives and, to import an element of originality, the olives themselves were stuffed with small wads of sausage-meat.

"Ah," said Madame Sarlat-Cohen, suddenly forgetting her party wall, "Marthe, you have the art of stuffing."

"It is an art," added Monsieur Duvernoy; "now think of what one can do with chestnuts . . ."

"And mushrooms," said Madame Bernay.

"The only stuffing in the world is dates," said Bernay, "inside a roast kid. I have had it *en Algérie*. A lovely country."

"Lovely country," echoed Mézin. "It reminds me of a story I heard. You know the Marquise de Salma-Valens, of course. . . ."

"Prettiest woman in Paris," said Bernay.

"*Oh, oh, Monsieur,*" cried Madame Duvernoy and Madame Sarlat-Cohen.

"*Pardon, pardon,*" said Bernay. "You are right, I withdraw."

"Well," Mézin resumed, "she was at Biskra this winter with her husband . . . once in a way . . ."

"Oh, oh!" from Monsieur Duvernoy.

". . . and she made great friends with the Sheik of the Beni-Salam, visited his harem, and there she met . . ."

"The ideal man," suggested Bernay.

"Well . . . hardly. . . ."

Everybody laughed except Henri and Suzanne. The girl sat as if she did not hear, her long dark lashes shadowing her cheeks. Henri watched her, hardly listening to the story, which did not moderate as it developed. It did not strike him as a curious story to tell before a young girl. But a *jeune fille* does not hear when she must not.

"Well, well, *la Marquise est une originale*," was Bernay's summing up after the anecdote had attained a triumphant finale.

A saddle of lamb, very small, perfectly rosy and saturated with butter, which slowly formed round it sluggish rills of rich brown gravy, was carved by Charlotte and served by the waiter.

"Do you play tennis, Mademoiselle?" asked Henri.

"*Oui, Monsieur*, I often play at the Racing."

"What?" cried Henri, delighted, "are you a member? I have just joined."

"I have been a member for a year," said Suzanne, smiling. "But I am not very good."

"You must play with me," said Henri. "I'll introduce you to Max Décugis."

"Oh no," said Suzanne, a look of real fear coming into her eyes, "he's much too fine for me. Of course I suppose you're good?"

Henri could not, a minute later, have accounted for his modesty, but he did not brag.

"I? No, very poor. You'd agree if you'd seen me play against Germot in the last handicap; he started at minus thirty and . . . well, I was simply crushed."

"Oh, but Germot is very good."

"Yes, especially at the net. Still, I wish I were cleverer. I often wish it about other things than tennis."

Suzanne looked at him out of the corner of her eyes. He was blushing a little and looked none the worse for it, for his blue eyes seemed the bluer and his little red-gold moustache the more pronounced. She liked his trim hand as he played with a knife-rest.

"I too," she said as if to herself. "It must be nice to be clever."

They were silent, and then Suzanne, suddenly realising how rapidly the conversation was becoming confidential, forced herself to address Madame Sarlat-Cohen, while Henri was pounced upon by Madame Bernay, whose nephew, it appeared, had served in the same regiment as Henri, but in another company.

As the *pouding à la crème* was served, Madame Duvernoy's brow cleared, for Charlotte had answered an agonised glance with a nod. The *fruits rafraîchis* had arrived. The party was becoming more animated, for Madeira had already mixed with some excellent Bordeaux and heavy Burgundy. Bernay had shed his reticence and was gravely gossiping of politics.

"Ah, Madame," he said to the hostess, "finance is a political education. When we want anything done there is always a *député* to bribe; he wants cash or shares or a billet in a bank for his wife's nephew; and there's a railway engineer or a factory inspector . . . and if you want to pass a bill you've got to have on your share register a number of august

names . . . but the august names don't stand against anything in the balance sheet."

"But it's horrible, Monsieur," said Madame Duvernoy. She was genuinely surprised; in spite of the great copper crash she was still the daughter of Lacour, the honest shopkeeper, the daughter of the "Fers de France," while her lifelong association with Jules Duvernoy, the rigid lawyer, did not incline her to condone bribery.

"What will you?" said Bernay in discouraged tones, "business is business. Of course it means worry, lawsuits . . ."

"Yes, certainly, you must have many lawsuits," said Madame Duvernoy quickly.

She remembered the big deal with the Turkish Government. Oh yes, she must be careful and amiable, she must capture this man. After all, business was business.

"Yes, yes," said Bernay abruptly, "I congratulate you on your dressmaker, Madame. And those diamonds harmonise with its colour like pearls with the shell."

Madame Duvernoy looked at him, puzzled and grateful. The man had snubbed her, but gracefully enough; for a second she flattered herself that his glance rested with interest on her plump but shapely hands. Meanwhile the conversation had grown heated, for Monsieur Duvernoy, Mézin and Madame Sarlat-Cohen were in the throes of a discussion as to the merits of Waldeck-Rousseau's bill for regulating the Religious Orders. This had lately been put into execution by Combes.

"Your Combes, *oh, la, la,*" sneered Monsieur Duvernoy, "a fine champion. . . ."

"A real Republican," growled Mézin.

"A brute, a hunter of nuns," screamed Madame Sarlat-Cohen.

"It was time they were hunted out. Catholicism! We've had enough of it."

Madame Sarlat-Cohen drew herself up stiffly.

"Monsieur Mézin," she said in solemn tones, "we are old friends, so you will please say nothing against my religion."

The lady's piety restored friendliness, for the four men all caught one another smiling.

"All the same," remarked Bernay, "it's not worth while getting angry about politics. They are rotten, rotten to the core. Combes is no worse than any other."

"Anyhow the King of England thought well of him," said Henri; "he gave him a title of nobility."

There was a pause during which everybody looked at the blushing young man.

"Yes," Henri stammered, "Combes is *Grand Croix de l'Ordre de la Reine Victoria*. He is *Sir Combes* in England."

"You have a very learned son," said Madame Bernay to Madame Duvernoy.

The hostess looked at her gratefully, but her husband's brow darkened.

"Well? And what does it prove? That Combes is an enemy of his country. Those English . . . ah, that *entente cordiale*, you believe in that sort of thing, you Radicals. . . ."

"Yes, we do," interrupted Mézin. "We've had enough war. We want friends."

"Nice friends you're making," sneered Monsieur Duvernoy; "the friends that turned you out of Egypt,

the friends that drove Marchand out of Fashoda and gave you Morocco instead. . . ."

"Fine country, Morocco," said Bernay. "The place is one mass of iron, phosphate—gold, too, they say."

Henri sat glowering at his father.

"Do you know," he said suddenly, "you're out of date, you're not moving with the times?"

"Times of scandal, corruption, socialism, drunkenness and other forms of immorality," snapped Madame Sarlat-Cohen.

"Times of justice, times when some of us are growing a conscience, understanding that it's a bad world, that people are unhappy and things ugly, and we're going to make them better if we have to go down into the street and fight behind a barricade."

"That's well spoken, young man," said Bernay. "Generous sentiments are suitable in youth."

Henri blushed, completely discomposed by the cynical praise. His father shrugged his shoulders, but a delightful glance from Suzanne reached Henri's eyes. It was curious, questioning; it was almost excited. A thrill ran through Henri's veins which he attributed to his outburst. Never before had he spoken his mind, so did not know it. He felt exhilarated and then suddenly depressed, for he was weakly conscious that his enthusiasm was artificial. He wondered even whether he had not drunk too much. He should have looked again at Suzanne, but possibly that solution would have escaped his limited capacity as a psychologist.

The dinner had been long, every item being a great success, especially the *fruits rafraîchis*. At half-past ten both men and women went together

into the drawing-room; again they paired off after the men had hung about in the hall less than five minutes. There was no sex hostility, no sex boredom, nothing to induce either men or women to draw together and talk of things exclusively theirs; indeed, there seemed to exist an anxiety in these elderly men and women to come and stay together.

Suzanne was made to sit at the piano and to play a polonaise of Chopin, then a nocturne. Long before the end and the applause Henri had felt stirred by the composer's somewhat sugary sentiment. The slim figure bending over the music, its clean-cut dark profile, the vivacity of the arms and hands, of all the body as it swayed with the rhythm, all this affected him. Then Marie came in carrying a large tray laden with glasses of orangeade, sweet biscuits and a small decanter of port (accompanied by liqueur glasses), which brought the party to an end. Everybody seemed to move at once and to try and shout louder than everybody else. Madame Sarlat-Cohen left first, having, she said, to meet friends at Maxim's. Then the Bernays went.

"*Charmante soirée*," said Madame Bernay, "*charmante soirée*." Suzanne shook hands with Henri. His gaucherie returned; he dared not refer to the *Racing Club de France*, where they might meet.

Mézin alone remained. "Well," he said, "I can't stay, I've got some one to meet at the *Américain*."

"You will never settle down," said Madame Duvernoy. "At your age, *voyons*."

"I assure you it's nothing. A man. Look here, if you want evidence I'll take Henri with me. I'll show him life. Well, Henri, what do you say?" He winked.

Henri hesitated; then his mother settled on his behalf.

"Very well," she said, "don't keep him out too late."

Madame Duvernoy took Henri apart.

"You have your key? Take your silk muffler; it's cold these spring nights. Knock at my door when you come in, *chéri*, and say good-night."

"*Oui, maman*," said Henri obediently. He kissed her and also his father, then hurried after Mézin, who was half-way down the stairs. He had gone down one flight when he heard his mother's voice above.

"Henri! Don't drink any beer, it will upset you after Bordeaux."

Madame Duvernoy stood at the top of the stairs until she heard the front door slam behind her son. She reflected that he was in good hands, for experienced. Of course, if it were only possible, it would be better for her son to stay at home, but men were not made that way. It was natural for Henri to want to have his fling, and she did not feel sure that she would like him any better if he showed no sign of wanting to have it. Of course there were risks in this nocturnal gadding which she did not care to face, entanglements, all that, but still it was always done; a man was a man, and he had better get all that sort of thing over before he settled down. She wondered vaguely what Henri would do, what he knew and thought of women; a pang shot through her heart as she reflected that there was, or would be, a woman whose kiss would attract Henri more than would hers. Still, that was the order of things, the immutable development which made of the school-boy, the recent conscript, that ideal steady thing, that reliable prop of society, a *jeune homme sérieux*.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

PARIS LA NUIT

I

"I'M glad you came, Henri," said Mézin as he settled himself with difficulty in his seat. "It's time you saw life at twenty-three."

"Twenty-four."

"Is it twenty-four? You don't make me feel any younger," said the heavy man. He heaved a sigh. For some seconds he seemed sunk in melancholy, conscious of his paunch, his whiskers, the shameful stigmata of age. But his nature reasserted itself as his eyes met those of a woman in the stage box. Confidentially he leant over towards his companion.

"You see that woman?"

Henri looked. She was a fine creature, thirty probably, whose long bust produced, as she sat, the impression that she must be tall. Her purple gown, covered with paillettes, was cut so low that the narrow shoulder-straps bore the whole of its weight; on her massive white shoulders and broad white neck sat an impertinent round head with a pointed chin. The mouth was so small, so pouting, so red, that it dominated every other feature, the straight thick nose, the long black Oriental eyes which shone, full of sleepy fire, under the high arched brows. She bore with indolence a mass of black wavy hair, sitting with one

bare arm over the edge of the box, careless of the young man in blue serge and of his companion, a girl who seemed but a shadow in the darkness behind her.

"Do you know her?" he asked.

"Know her? No," said Mézin, "except that I know, like everybody, that it's Loulou Lamirale."

"Loulou Lamirale," Henri repeated. The name was familiar, not only because Loulou flaunted on thousands of postcards and posters, but in virtue of some indistinct personal associations.

"Yes," said Mézin quickly, "you know—Madame Bernay."

Henri blushed; while Mézin, who was as much at his ease in the music-hall as he was dull in the drawing-room, began to laugh. The laugh grated on Henri, he could not have said why; somehow the connection injured some fine secret feeling. Still, he echoed the laugh in duty bound.

"*Ah, oui*, so they say. . . . He has luck. . . . But what does she do here, at Parisiana? I thought she was at the Ambassadeurs," Mézin whispered in his ear, with greed in his eyes. Now and then he broke into a chuckle, which Henri faintly echoed. Mézin unwound his tale, while Henri's eyes roved round the hall. It was small, undistinctive as a theatre in its red and gold, its ceiling heavily frescoed with ponderous nudités, its curtains loaded with advertisements, its growing and waning blaze of footlights. They sat in the stalls, tightly wedged in the motley Paris crowd; groups of young men in serge or smooth grey stuffs, smoking cigarettes, elaborately uninterested in the show, and mostly looking at the women in the balcony; couples, some curiously assorted; boys with downy upper lips and well-dressed, portly women, a few smart elderly men in evening dress,

with long thin hair and grey beards, whose button-holes were flowered, by the side of diminutive shop-girls with light hair and fat little hands; and other couples more singular even in their unexpectedness, heavy men of forty or fifty in short coats and bowler hats, sitting with their obvious wives, who had no pretensions to style—wives whose large busts threatened to burst the seams of their tight white blouses. Further, two officers of the line in worn uniforms, and, in a corner, a youth of sixteen, thin and yellow-faced, in the black uniform of his school, whose sheepish eyes became suddenly and cynically bold as he dared to cross glances with a furtive woman in the *promenoir*.

Henri had a feeling of aloofness, boredom. The scene was not new; besides, it had never stimulated him. Still, he had to show interest, to recreate by self-suggestion a taste for "life."

"Ah," cried Mézin, "the next is Charlotte Opom. You know her, of course."

"*Naturellement*," Henri lied with conviction. He threw himself back in his seat with a great air of man-of-the-worldliness. He had heard of Charlotte Opom, the new star; he had not seen her, but it did not do for a French youth to appear ignorant of anything, surprised, pleased or indignant; to appear, above all, insensible to the arts.

The footlights blazed for Charlotte Opom, *danseuse et chanteuse excentrique*. She was a slim girl, sixteen perhaps, with thin, peaked shoulders, prominent collar-bones and arms, narrow as matches, that gleamed white by contrast with the irrepressible redness of her hands. Her cheeks were stained vivid red, her hair concealed by a great yellow wig, the curls of which descended on her shoulders. She was

dressed in a long black pinafore dress tied in at the tiny waist by an enormous red sash, while scarlet socks, above which gleamed a strip of pink tight, imparted to the little figure an absurd childish air.

Charlotte Opom danced in silence, with the curious staccato gestures of a marionette, stopping suddenly at the intervals of the syncopated tune with one leg raised to a horizontal position, while the short, black skirt revealed a broader strip of pink tight. Quicker the music, quicker the little figure up and down, round and round, a whirling top on the axis of a slim leg, a top with a yellow head and a broad red central band. The footlights blazed up, while, as the hall suddenly darkened, a red light played on the dancer, bathing her all, converting her into an arabesque.

"*Pas mal, pas mal*," said Mézin heavily.

Henri did not answer. His attention had been distracted by the sound of a kiss. He looked quickly towards Loulou Lamirale, but she had not moved; she was a shadow in the box; her long white arm hung lonely as if detached from her spectral body. Just then the lights went up, there was a squall of clapping, some bravos; Charlotte Opom bowed; she smiled with her long thin red mouth. Then quickly she began to sing as a Union Jack fell on her shoulders from the roof. No longer was she the irresponsible dancing child; she was *la petite anglaise*, a queer caricature of thinness and vice; she was the Englishwoman France believes in: fair, scraggy, drunken and full of singular vices hidden under a cloak of puritanism. In her high slum voice Charlotte Opom sang—

"C'est moi la p'tite anglaise
Du Boul'vard Rochechouart.
C'est moi qui aime et baise
Du matin jusqu'au soir. . . ."

The blue eyes rolled right and left, the thin upper lip curled, full of suggestion, showing the eye-teeth. In halting verse Charlotte Opom told of her *Lord anglais*, *la Tamise* and the policeman; then, in a shriek, her chorus—

“Oh ! Yes ! plum-puddinn.
English spokinn !”

She remained rigid, swathed in the folds of the Union Jack, like a cheap doll . . . then she told her joys—

“Mes amants j'en ai seize ;
Je fais leur désespoir,
Parce que je m'mets à l'aise
Avec mon beau lifguar !
Oh ! Yes ! plum-puddinn.
English spokinn !”

There were shouts, a recall, a denied encore. Another turn pressed on, a sinister idiot comedian who prated of his conquests while he frequently removed and polished his glass eye. Then the interval, unenlivened by music. There was a greater buzz of talk, many cigarettes were lighted; some of the youths fixed their eyes more boldly on the women in the *promenoir*, while the youngest assumed elaborate indifference and read the pink *Journal des Sports*. Loulou Lamirale turned upon the audience her shapely white shoulders. Henri sat back in his seat. He was unutterably bored, tired. He could not have defined the cause, for his boredom was subconscious; he would have been shocked if he had been told that he thought all this inane and vulgar. Mézin's voice broke in; he hardly heard him, for his wearied eyes were employed in reading on the curtain the advertisements of the *Chocolat Menier*, Dufayel's shop, *la menthe Ricqlès*. The word “Bernay” suddenly drew him from his torpor.

"Yes," Mézin was saying; "oh, he is right, Bernay. His wife—well, you've seen her. I wonder whether she was pretty twenty years ago."

"I expect so," said Henri suddenly; "her daughter, anyhow. . . ." He stopped abruptly. Mézin began to laugh as he blushed.

"Ah, ah! you haven't got your eyes in your pocket. But . . . no larks. They haven't got a sou."

"What!" cried Henri. "But Bernay makes millions."

"Mere thousands," said Mézin; "besides . . . ask Loulou Lamirale."

Henri looked at the enchantress with an animosity he could not explain. That woman . . . while Suzanne Bernay. . . . Oh, preposterous!"

"*Mon pauvre enfant*," added Mézin, "Bernay's castles are not even built with cards. They're built with his companies' scrip, which isn't anything like as strong. That girl won't have fifty thousand francs *dot*, believe me."

Henri was disturbed. Fifty thousand francs only!

"She'll never marry with that," he said.

"Hardly . . . unless somebody falls in love with her pretty face."

"*Oui, oui*," said Henri formlessly. Her pretty face. Her pretty face. He found himself repeating the words. Mézin went on talking; he had forgotten the Bernays by now; he was speaking of his own affairs, about an open-minded friend he had in the Rue des Martyrs; but Henri hardly listened, for in his brain two sentences revolved chaotic: Her pretty face . . . only fifty thousand francs.

They sat out another turn, the eternal mongrel fandango whose popularity never wanes; then a hideous

duet between a squat dark girl, whose shawl and black hair falling low over her ears suggested those who wander by night near the walls of the city. Her companion, tall, clean shaven, his hair plastered on his forehead into an *accroche-cœur*, wore the famous high cap with a peak of the stage apache. At last, the girl's voice ended the duet. . . . In spite of her ugly intention, it remained merely commonplace.

Every tone of her drawling voice was full of the greasy slurring of the Paris gutter. It was rich in its suggestion of base temptation, dim gas lamps, desert suburban streets, the ready, waiting knife of the protector. The intolerable caress of the black eyes zoned with kohl, the atmosphere of venality stirred in Henri a passion of disgust. The woman was trampling on him, on his soul, perhaps. He seized Mézin by the arm.

"Let's go," he said; "*c'est idiot.*"

"You're right," said Mézin amiably; "we'll go to the Casino. That's the place! *La vie, Henri; la vraie vie.*"

Henri would have resisted, told Mézin truthfully that he would rather go home, but he was influenced by the powerful animal zest of his senior, shamed by the thought that he was not liking life.

II

The high vault of the Casino de Paris reflected the effulgent lights upon the crowded groups round the little tables in the centre of the floor, dark little groups of men dotted here and there, with the white shoulders

and light dresses of their companions, discreet couples sitting with head touching head, and *blasé* couples languidly puffing at cigarettes, with eyes fixed on the mauve haze. Above, in the balcony and boxes, fashionables watching the scene with Olympian detachment: women in *demi-toilette*, whose social status forbade them to condescend to full dress; languid Americans, hatchet-faced and coarse-skinned, whose languor often slipped from them, leaving them hysterically merry and taut-nerved; large dark Jewesses with massive brown arms and shoulders, bovine and so heavily loaded with diamonds as to appear stiffened by them into statues of Asiatic deities. Among them their men, slim youths whose faces were white, shoulders and chests narrow, youths with plastered hair, wilder youths with untidy, wig-like heads; elderly beaus, whose thin wrinkled faces bent low and seductive as they spoke very near the women's ears; and old men, fat, overflowing from their tight, sometimes stained and unbrushed, clothes. On all of them a great air of establishment, of distant participation in the scene below.

Mézin and Henri sat in the central space at a small table in the middle of the hall. From the crowd around them rose a vast hum of talk, little cries, shrill peals of laughter, clinkings of spoons and glasses. A *bourgeois* and his heavy wife sat next to them, silently absorbed in the empty stage; the man puffed slowly at a cigar, while his wife sucked through a straw some *sirop de groseille*. On the other side a group of dark young men, in clothes so tight that on the back of one the braces seemed to start out through the cloth; they clustered close, talking intimately, breaking away only to indicate a woman by a nod or to light a cigarette.

Henri's eyes roved further to a couple which interested him.

"*Dégoûtant*," he said to Mézin, indicating them.

"Oh," protested Mézin, "it's not more disgusting than anything else. It's true, though; the old gentleman is a bit ripe."

Henri looked at the couple again, the old man with white hair, a face heavily touched by rosacia, pendulous cheeks, dull eyes, and a mouth that perpetually chewed some non-existent food. With him was a girl of sixteen or so; she was small, pitifully small and thin, marked already by time or hunger. Her wide, black eyes looked out fearfully, half avoiding those of the old man and horribly half-appealing to him.

"I think it's awful," said Henri hotly. "Why, he might be her grandfather . . . I'd put an old man like him in gaol. . . ."

"Well, you'll be old one day," said Mézin bluntly.

Henri stopped short. He too, he would be like that; perhaps he too would be old without forgetting youth. The feeling rushed in upon him that he too would then still see the beauty of women. His eyes roved, noticing with appreciation the graceful curve of a tall fair girl's neck, the small brown hand of another as she held up to her eyes a glass full of green curaçao.

"No," he declared, with an effort, as he regained self-control, "when I'm as old as that I'll be married and have a family; all that's . . ." He had nearly said "absurd," but dared not, and ended lamely, "Of course, later on—I'm not going to plant my cabbages yet."

Mézin began to laugh, and spoke at random.

"*Oh, la, la*, Monsieur is a *bourgeois*. Monsieur has domestic virtues. So it's arranged with Suzanne?"

"Monsieur Mézin!" Henri had blushed angrily. He felt impelled to throw his cup of coffee at the elder man's head.

"All the same, fifty thousand francs—it's not fat," Mézin added negligently.

Henri's face suddenly fell. His brain was in a state of turmoil. For the first five minutes he took no heed of the Greek play which had now begun on the raised stage. Yet the play—*Les Courtisanes de Pelos*—had its moments of grace. The background was made up of the tall pink columns of a marble temple, hung with festoons of laurel leaves. On the right, beyond a terrace, lay a broad blue swelling sea. A crowd of women, slightly clad in light draperies, formed a clamorous group at one corner, with raised bare arms, while before them a handsome youth with curly dark hair inspected them as if uninterested. On the terrace another youth sat cross-legged, playing on the pipes a monotonous melancholy air.

Mézin nudged Henri.

"I say, that big girl in red, *belle fille, hein?*"

Henri nodded approval. Though his brain still seethed, he could not help being fascinated by the forms of the women as their modern ungainliness plastered the thin stuffs on their bodies. There was stimulation, too, in the studied clamour from which voice after voice emerged, promising the young Greek unknowable joys, bargaining, praying, casting at him the effluvia of temptation. The women crowded round the youth, pulling him this way and that, thrusting their faces into his, hoisting him at last triumphant

on their shoulders. And then the crack of whips, wild cries, the intrush of the tetrarch's guards, a wild *mêlée* of brass helmets and Macedonian bucklers, an anachronic orgy of armour, a capturing of screaming women.

A little shiver of delight had passed over the hall as the whips began to crack. The *bourgeois* still sat smoking in silence while his wife sucked the *sirop de groseille*, but the four young men had their eyes fixed on the stage, while a film had covered those of the old man who now held in his hand that of the wild-eyed child. The play unrolled, rapid and suggestive, full of shameless offers and requests, redolent with floggings and crucifyings, with horrid torturing of slaves; crescendo, as the courtesans began with the guards the final orgy of wine poured out of goat-skins, the columns of the temple fell crashing to reveal upon her globe Aphrodite, a nude living figure, a collar of pearls round her neck, a looking-glass in her hand to mirror her lovely cruel face.

The curtain fell slowly as applause crepitated from every corner. Mézin meditatively dabbed his moist forehead with his handkerchief and turned to Henri.

"I say," he remarked, with the solemnity of a babe, "it's a fine thing, Greek art." Henri did not answer, for his schooldays were not so distant that he could not remember Greek art as somewhat different, but he did not know enough to make a comment. But Mézin saved him perplexity. He suddenly awoke to activity as he saw two minor actresses he knew in the *promenoir*. He made for the semi-circular space beyond the balustrade, where flows a continuous uneasy stream of women; Henri could see him struggle, wave his arms, then speak to them. In another

minute he returned, the women following him. They sat down on either side of Henri.

"Allow me to introduce my friend," said Mézin. The two women bowed easy assent.

"Mademoiselle Irma de Valmo, Monsieur Henri Duvernoy; Mademoiselle Dorinne de Fauchamps, Monsieur Henri Duvernoy."

Henri bowed. He would not have felt embarrassed if his mood had not been one of weariness and if his brain had not been stirred by a single idea. He examined Irma attentively as she talked to Mézin. The girl was short, broad, agreeably plump of shoulder and neck; her brown eyes had the vivacity of Gascony, her ample bust some animation. She seemed unable to remain still; continually she wriggled in her seat, tapped the table with her plump be ringed hands, tossed her crop of scented black hair in Mézin's face as he leant over to whisper in her ear, his lips very close to it, his shoulder touching hers. At last a voice broke into his meditation.

"You are very absent, Monsieur," it said slowly, with a drawl.

Henri started; it was Dorinne, the tall, thin, lily-like Dorinne.

"Yes . . . that is . . . I am tired," he mumbled.

The actress said nothing but, with the most extreme deliberation, smiled. The smile began by a slow upward curving of her long thin lips; no dimple formed in the flat and hardly flushing cheeks; then the white teeth showed, the blue eyes were half concealed by the eyelids, a tremor shook the face and a little the golden curls. As gradually as it had come it waned, and Henri once more had before him a long slim girl with narrow shoulders, dressed in light

blue *crêpe de chine* which neither rose nor fell as she breathed, whose hands were very slender, and on whose face sat enigmatic an abstraction as great as his. The smile made Henri uncomfortable; it was so calculated, so much the smile of an actress.

"It is very hot," he remarked vaguely. Then with more decision, "May I offer you something, Mademoiselle?"

"No, thanks, Monsieur," said Dorinne. She leant back in her chair, and Henri was struck by the fine long line that joined her ear with the tip of her thin shoulder. From the corners of her eyes she watched him lazily.

"You do not look at the show, Monsieur," she said at length.

"I'd rather look at you." Henri plunged with a horrible sense of helplessness. Still there was truth in his words, for certainly the Chinese juggler who was eating live rockets could not rival the languid Dorinne. Again Dorinne smiled and, as if by inadvertence, raised her long hand ringed with turquoises and green scarabs and negligently let it fall near Henri's. And, as inadvertently, Henri's hand closed on hers. Suddenly there was a peal of laughter from Mademoiselle de Valmo.

"*Ah, ah, les amoureux*," she cried, pointing at the interlocked hands.

"Touching," said Mézin.

"Charming infants . . . ah, what a lighthouse . . ."

Henri was blushing bright red, hence the "lighthouse" joke. Mademoiselle de Fauchamps was too aloof to take the slightest notice of the raillery which rained on them for another minute. At last Henri withdrew his hand and Mézin took pity on him.

"*Voyons*," he said at length, "it is late. Shall we go on to the Cabaret Secret?"

"*Oui, oui*," Irma almost screamed, clapping her hands.

"Oh, I say . . ." said Henri, with a doubtful intonation.

"*Oui, oui*," Irma began again, "it's quite close, Monsieur, just in the Rue Pigalle."

And then, suddenly exhibiting unexpected latent force, Dorinne rose to her feet and wrapped round her head and shoulders a black silk scarf which embowered her pale face.

"I am ready," she remarked.

Meekly they followed her.

III

The Cabaret Secret is probably unknown to most Parisians. It has the distinction of the most select places, for it does not court the public, it does not advertise, nor does it pay journalists to record that So-and-So was there. It discreetly occupies the *rez-de-chaussée* of a *bourgeois* house in the Rue Pigalle, from which it is separated by thick white lace curtains that shut in its rosy lights. Inside it has nothing luxurious, no gilt plate, no crystal ware, no thick-piled carpet: it is a cabaret, pure and simple. On its red-tiled floor stand rough deal tables without tablecloths, surrounded by hard and uncomfortable chairs; a peasant's *bahut* contains the napkins which are parsimoniously doled out, while on a dumb waiter stand in earthenware dishes little confections of cold meat and fish. If coffee is called for it is brought to

each guest in its own little metal machine, which stands on a glass into which the coffee slowly trickles. Over all a number of oil lamps shed a faint glow; the Cabaret Secret flouts electricity as vulgar; in one thing only has it surrendered: the lamps have pink shades. But the appearance of roughness, the coarse ware, the clumsy attendance of the peasant-like servants, are all on the surface, for the meats are exquisite. The Ritz, Larue, Durand, Armenonville, cannot equal the Cabaret's *salade Russe*, its *œufs à la Béchamel*, its *aspics*, nor its private bins of Mumm, Heidsieck and Pommard. And its high prices, too, justify its existence.

Mézin, Henri and their companions found themselves at a small table among a more brilliant assembly than at the Casino. Altogether there were some twenty suppers besides themselves: a well-brushed obvious Englishman in evening dress drinking whisky-and-soda with a petite dark French girl all gold spangles and red mousseline de soie; two French dandies, elderly and a little faded, with wrinkles round their tired eyes, in company with two bold-looking red-haired girls—sisters, no doubt, whose plump white shoulders emerged alike and shimmering from black velvet low-cut frocks; further, two young men, both dressed in morning coats, with pale fancy vests, faintly coloured and rather flowing ties, rings on their small well-tended hands; and other couples, mostly ill-assorted with regard to age, where the men were quieter and more dandified than fashion-plates, the women assertive, inclined to plume themselves because they were among the elect.

"*Le Duc de Warmery*," Irma whispered to Dorinne, as she indicated one of the elderly dandies.

There was a putting together of heads and stifled gigglings, while Mézin nudged Henri.

"My treat," he said quickly.

Henri would have liked to protest, but did not know what to say. Never before had he seen Mézin so liberal. Indeed, he was famous for riding outside omnibuses in the rain so as to save three sous. But then Mézin had money for pleasures, and it pleased him to be seen socially with actresses, even though they were not of the first rank. It was hardly a merry party in spite of Irma's rushing pleasantries, Dorinne's childish surprise at finding truffles inside a sweetbread. Mézin laughed good-naturedly, stroked Irma's plump arm, while Dorinne more languidly than ever leant over towards Henri so that he could breathe her scented hair. Round them the couples were assuming affectionate attitudes with delightful *désinvolture*. The Duc de Warmery and his companion, whom they now knew to be Nicozi, the aluminium king, were crowded shoulder to shoulder with the red-haired girls; the blue smoke of cigarettes slowly rose from the centre of the group of heads. The two young men lit cigarettes from one another's, their faces close together as the burning ends touched, and their eyes lucent as they exchanged fragrant Turkish from gold cases set with coral. The Englishman at frequent intervals ordered another whisky-and-soda and drank it down in three gulps, while his companion yawned, meanwhile watching him.

Henri felt strange in this gilded company, where ennui seemed to reign, except in the group where the high voice of the elderly Duc could be heard drawling a story suited to the Cabaret.

"*C'est chic, le Cabaret,*" said Dorinne at last.

"I've never been here before," Henri confessed.

"I'm showing him life," said Mézin, laughing.

"*Papa,*" screamed Irma. She was convulsed at her own joke.

"*Éducation de Prince,*" Dorinne added.

"Oh, it may be the first time, but it won't be the last. *Hein, Dorinne?*"

Mézin nudged Dorinne, then looked at Henri. The young man was so disturbed by the implication that he almost rose to his feet.

"No, no, you're not going," cried Irma, her brown eyes flashing.

"*Voyons, Henri,*" Mézin expostulated, "why surely . . . aren't you having a good time? Why, we'll never forgive you."

The torrent of words strengthened Henri's resolve. He rose to his feet. He could not have said why. Dorinne's blue eyes were full of amusement and she certainly attracted him, but so many thoughts warred in his brain that he could not disentangle them. He felt horribly cowardly, silly, unworldly. He was unpleasantly conscious of the contemptuous and amused glance of the Duc de Warmery, of the sullen stare of the Englishman whose heavy hand clutched his refilled glass. But at all costs, he must escape, try and find outside relief from the chaos of his mind, breathe any but this vaguely alluring and horribly confusing atmosphere. He could not have said what he wanted to think about, but solitude he did want.

"I'm sorry . . ." he faltered.

"Oh, no importance," said Mézin in a cold voice.

IV

As Henri softly stole past his mother's room he heard her call him.

"Henri?" She came out of her room in a dressing-gown, holding up a candle. "Have you amused yourself, *mon enfant*?"

"*Oui, maman.*"

"Ah, that is well. Here, drink this, it will make you sleep." She gave him a fond admiring look and shut the door. Henri stood there for a second, then swallowed the water flavoured with sugar and *fleur d'oranger*.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

LE SPOR'

I

THE Duvernoys came out of the *Métropolitain*. Before them stood the Arc de Triomphe, dazzlingly white and enormously large in its isolation; it stood very Roman against the brilliant blue sky, its vast bulk circled by many cabs, carriages and motor-cars, all of which were making towards the west. The happy bustle of Sunday seemed to infect the passers-by; the *sergent de ville*, who twirled his black moustache and wondered whether the young warmth of April did not already justify an exchange into his summer white ducks; the newspaper seller in the *Kiosque*, who still prudently swathed herself in shawls but rested her feet on an empty stove; the servants in their blue aprons, who passed by gaily swinging their market baskets. The air was light; the trees, already rich, were early green. Little knots of scorchers swept by, their heads well down to the handle-bars; motor-cars manned by furred Olympians haughtily breasted the rise of the Champs Elysées; the *New York Herald's* English four-in-hand went by at a gallop, loaded with Americans bound for Longchamp, the postillion gaily tooting his horn.

"Fine day, *hein*," remarked Monsieur Duvernoy. He carefully removed his top-hat and wiped his brow.

The little man looked almost smart, for his frock-coat was new and well brushed, his long pointed boots were very bright; his grey overcoat sat lightly upon his shoulders as if proud of its red ribbon, for Monsieur Duvernoy had recently been made a *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*.

"Yes," said Madame Duvernoy, "we shall meet everybody in the Bois. It's a pity, though, they've got this *Métropolitain*; now everybody can get there it's becoming quite common."

"*Mais, maman,*" said Henri, with a laugh, "we came in the *Métro*', didn't we? We mustn't grumble at what science gives us."

"Science," Monsieur Duvernoy burst out, "you are ridiculous, Henri. This science of yours, it's at the bottom of the rottenness of the age; your motor-cars and your telegraphs and your hygiene . . . why Socialism would never have been heard of without them . . . the people get too much science, not too little, and that means a hysterical nation, a nation of sentimentalists who won't be a nation at all if the birth-rate continues to go down and Socialism . . ."

"Jules," said Madame Duvernoy gently but finally, "don't agitate yourself like that, and don't wave your stick. Besides, you've forgotten to change your red ribbon, it's faded."

"It's not faded," said Monsieur Duvernoy, still angry but deflected; "I've only worn it three weeks."

"It is faded."

"It isn't. Henri, is it faded?"

"*Oui, papa,*" said Henri revengefully, "one might think it was an old *Mérite Agricole*."

Monsieur Duvernoy shrugged his shoulders and

strode on furiously, his wife and son following a few steps behind him. Madame Duvernoy was looking young and rather smart in the brown velvet coat of the day, a large hat in stuff to match, trimmed with erect brown feathers which set off and elongated her round face. She looked up approvingly at her big son; never, she thought, had she seen him so handsome, so large-eyed, so erect. His blue suit and striped grey overcoat emphasised his fresh colour. They commented on Monsieur Duvernoy's tantrum as they followed him, avoiding the white tramway that follows the Avenue Marceau, the rumbling La Villette-Trocadéro in the Avenue Kléber. They caught him up as he passed between the two little wooden shanties where old women sell gingerbread, sweets, hoops, spades, balls, and serve out halfpenny-worths of *coco*, that strange brew of liquorice roots.

"Well," said Monsieur Duvernoy, with a sardonic air, "you're very slow this morning. I was thinking of sitting down *aux panés* and waiting for you." He indicated with a gesture the rows of little iron chairs where the *panés*, i. e. the "stonybrokes," are supposed to enjoy for a penny a view of the fashionable world.

"Sit down if you like, Jules," said Madame Duvernoy; "Henri and I are going on. If you think I've put my brown velvet on for nothing!"

"*Tu es coquette, maman*," said Henri, smiling.

"Well, it suits her," said Monsieur Duvernoy, with returning good temper. "You mustn't laugh at her, or I shan't treat you to cakes at Gagé's."

They laughed all three, remembering the now distant days when little Henri, in a striped red-and-white suit, was taken solemnly every Sunday into

the shop of the great pastrycook, Avenue Victor Hugo, and there feasted on cakes.

"Ah," said Henri, "it's all very well talking of *Gagé, papa*, but you never would treat me a cake costing forty centimes."

The Avenue du Bois was already very full. Young men passed in twos and threes, most of them immaculate but suggesting by their ceremonious air, their elaborate light ties and tiny walking-sticks, that they were taking part in a rite. Many mothers went by with their daughters, the parent elaborately dressed, buxom and flat-backed, the girls short and already plump, in modest but extremely light clothing, demure but watchful from the corners of their eyes. And family parties too—fat untidy fathers with shiny faces and wives like badly tied bundles, and rowdy, bare-legged, pale-faced boys, and dignified little girls with stiff locks and much regard for their short stubby frocks; South Americans whose linen contrasted with their dark skins and jewellery; and many young couples—the man aggressively smart, though sometimes unshaven, the woman a thing of steel and leather, with fine bold eyes and blazing hair. Among them ran the dogs, curious mongrels, collie sheep-dogs and spaniel Airedales, for no dog shows breed in Paris except the imported fox-terrier and the occasional Italian greyhound. Here and there, on one of the little chairs, sat a handsome woman who held on a long leash a fine poodle with a silver bracelet on one paw. Beyond, in the roadway, carriages passed, drawn by poor horses and sporting poor liveries, carrying towards the Bois a staid edition of the pedestrians.

The Duvernoys were drowned in the crowd, and, already, much to Madame Duvernoy's satisfaction,

Henri and her husband had three times taken off their hats.

"That was Madame Bergstein and her daughter," Madame Duvernoy remarked.

"Ah?" said Monsieur Duvernoy. "Do you still see them?"

"Yes, sometimes. One has to, you know. Of course Lucie is getting rather old to have her hair down her back; but it's no good, they'll never marry her. No *dot* to speak of, and she *affiches*¹ herself with everybody."

"I hate that Bergstein woman," said Henri, "and the way Lucie looks at me . . ."

"Ah, ah, Monsieur Don Juan again," said Monsieur Duvernoy.

Henri blushed, but was rescued from further chaff by a sudden meeting with several friends: Monsieur Samaro, Consul for some obscure South American state, and his wife, their two swarthy daughters and their fox-terrier, together with Carlheim, the *coulis-sier*, who formed a noisy group where the Avenue Malakoff cleaves in two the Avenue du Bois. There were cries from both sides.

"*Ah, Madame, enchantée . . .*"

"How long it is since we met! . . . And you, Monsieur Carlheim, how are you?"

"But it is Monsieur Henri! Oh, but I must introduce you to my daughters. Dolorès! Mercedès! where are you?"

The swarthy daughters blazed brilliant smiles; their liquid black eyes seemed to flow in the yellowish whites. Carlheim's square jowl glittered fatly as he lowered his bald head in deep bows. Monsieur Duvernoy turned to Samaro: within a few seconds

¹ Flaunts.

the word "concession" could be heard recurring in the *rastaquouère's*¹ guttural voice. Meanwhile, the two mothers agitated the marriage of Mademoiselle Stein.

"What do you think!" screamed Madame Samaro, "marrying the Comte de Vieilleroche! A little German Jewess!"

"Disgusting," agreed Madame Duvernoy. "No wonder he wanted six millions."

"Seven, *ma chère amie*, seven, and it's none too much."

"These Jews, they get everything, banks, newspapers . . ."

"Yes, and decorations, and seats in the Sénat . . . ah! *ma chère Madame Duvernoy*, what is France to become?" wailed the South American.

"Finished, the country's finished," said Monsieur Duvernoy over his shoulder.

Meanwhile, Dolorès and Mercedès were trying to put Henri at his ease. He stood by them smiling and awkwardly swinging his stick; these two massive girls with their splendid figures, enormous eyes, heavy black hair, overpowered him by sheer weight. They talked furiously, but kept very close to the skirts of Madame Samaro. Within one minute Henri had been asked whether he liked *le spor'*, whether he was going to the dance of the de Torraltas, whether he liked Monsieur Bergeret, and did he not think that Anatole France was a *sale socialiste*.

"*Oui, oui*," he said vaguely; then with an effort, "you have a pretty dog."

"*N'est-ce pas?*" clamoured Dolorès, "I adore him. His name is O'dbay."

¹ Shady Hispano-American.

"That means *ojos de bitoque*,"¹ added Mercedes, and, for no apparent reason, she flashed so bold a glance at Henri that he blushed again. But now Carlheim intervened with ponderous joviality, and at once the girls turned towards him as lively and seductive as if he were the younger man. All the while Madame Samaro's lustrous eyes roved towards them, listening to every word, while she kept up exuberantly with Madame Duvernoy the wrangle as to the *dot* of *la petite* Stein. And then, while Henri stood disconsolately by, alone, lost, something wonderful, beautiful happened: he saw Suzanne. The Bernays, father, mother and daughter, passed them by; the two groups were too engrossed to notice each other, but Suzanne and Henri's eyes crossed. He just had time to take off his hat, see the short upper lip curl in a faint smile, the dark eyes sparkle, and she was gone.

"Who's that you saluted, Henri?" asked Madame Duvernoy, who had seen his gesture.

"A friend," said Henri.

There were little cries of protest.

"*Oh, oh, mystère . . .* Monsieur Henri, really. . . . You must look after him, *ma chère Madame Duvernoy*. . . ."

And suddenly Henri realised he had lied as defensively as a man raises his arm to ward off a blow.

II

It was one o'clock. The elder Duvernoys, having been duly taken to meet more friends in the Allée

¹ Goggle-eyes.

des Acacias, had gone home to lunch, while Henri, who claimed that the day was too fine to waste, turned towards the grounds of the Racing Club de France. His was a curious blended mood, for he felt joyful and yet worried, as if expecting and fearing something which might come, delightful perhaps and perhaps sorry. He was waiting for some event and mentally warding it off. He turned towards the lake without seeing Madame Sarlat-Cohen drive past in an open carriage with another woman and a dragoon in full dress. He stopped to look at the lake, whose pale green surface was everywhere corrugated by the wind, at the swans who swam past him, slow and majestic, bearing as thuribles the blazing torches of their beaks. And he was suddenly invaded by an inflowing conviction that all things were very beautiful and a little melancholy, that there were ideals he did not know, desires he barely perceived; in all humility he wondered whether he could be happy, whether he deserved to be, whether he had wings to fly with, skies to fly to. His dream persisted as he went on towards the Club grounds, for the vision of universal beauty floated in the scantily clad branches of the young trees; it gilded the gravel drive, the rough pavilion, the little clustering tables where a few young men sat in front of the athlete's non-alcoholics, the cinder track even, where he could see three youths in running shorts practising starts. He stood for some minutes watching a man put the weight. He was a big broad fellow, English probably, and every time he threw his shoulder back to poise the weight and swayed upon his bent haunches a long stringy muscle appeared on his side through the thin shirt. He too was beautiful.

"Well, *mon vieux*," said a voice at his elbow, "I've been waiting for you for a quarter of an hour."

"Ah, Javal, pardon. I've been promenading my ancestors," said Henri, with a slight start as he awoke from his dream.

"All right then, I forgive you, duty is a noble thing," Javal answered good-humouredly. He was a short dark youth, with long black hair parted in the middle and combed back. He had an agreeable pale face, dark eyes, a little jet-black moustache with waxed ends. His blue serge suit and red tie, his grey felt hat, seemed to emphasise his neat, rather barberish air. On the third finger of his left hand he wore a heavy gold ring.

"*Ma foi*," he added, "I thought you were never coming, but there is no rush for tables. We had better lunch at once or we shan't be able to play until three."

"Oh, digestion," said Henri, with a self-satisfied air, "you think too much of upsetting yourself; what does it matter if you do play as soon as you've done lunch? Now I——"

"All right," Javal interrupted, "you'll tell me about that later on."

The hypochondriac turned towards the pavilion, followed by the eupeptic Henri. His thin dark frame could not stand ill usage as could that of the heavier fair youth; his health, which was not so feeble as he thought, featured in his life, prescribed certain exercises and even limited his pleasures. All through lunch Henri rallied him rather ponderously.

"Now then, Javal, no radishes, bad for bile. And, what do I see—claret? acid, my boy, acid. Gout, rheumatism, you've got them already, haven't you?"

"Do not be idiotic," grumbled Javal.

"Idiotic? Not at all. You must be careful: you know you over-eat. Why, you ought to be a vegetarian!"

"*Ah, fiche-moi la paix.*"

"There, you're losing your temper now. That means sedatives, no dances, no love. . . ."

"Ah, love," said Javal viciously, "you know a lot about that. Pass me the mutton."

Henri passed him the mutton; then, rather subdued, he spoke again.

"Ah, love! it's a beautiful thing."

Javal began to laugh.

"*Oh, la, la, mon pauvre Duvernoy*, you're not going to idealise that sort of thing."

"Well, what are you going to idealise if you don't idealise that?" Henri asked a little tartly.

The dark youth looked at him with an air of pity, twisting his little black moustache.

"Nothing, of course. What do you want to idealise anything for? I tell you, idealism's a coat of paint you put on a rotten wall to make it look new."

"Love's not a rotten wall. It's the only thing worth while."

Javal looked at him round-eyed.

"I say," he remarked very slowly, "you're not in love, Duvernoy? That would be a bad business."

"Well, supposing I was? There's no harm in it," Henri stammered. He felt a blush creep up his cheeks.

Javal played with his fork for a while without raising his eyes.

"No, I don't say there is. I, for instance, you

know that Madame Vallot . . . well, everybody knows that . . . but anyhow it's not for life. I don't pretend to myself that it's the first time I ever loved. It isn't," he added complacently.

"Oh, I know," said Henri, "everybody knows that story. You're not in love with her."

"Yes, I am; I'm always in love with the woman of the day. But I know how long those things last, while you . . ."

"I what?"

"Oh, you, you're different," said Javal. "You're full of ideas about pure lives and the fireside and children. *Bourgeois*, that's what it is."

Henri flushed under the insult. To be a *bourgeois* is terrible, for it is a low thing, and yet one cannot easily refute the charge. They ate their cheese in silence. Both had their eyes fixed on one of the tennis courts where three young girls were playing with a middle-aged man. Their bounds and little cries held their attention. Then Javal burst out again.

"*Vois-tu, Duvernoy*, that's all very well when you've done with everything else. No hurry, you see: have a good time, understand that women don't matter, even if they are charming. Fall in love if you like, but keep your head cool. *La grande passion*, that's very fine *au Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt*; but in life there are other things: one's position, and money. *La galette*,¹ *mon vieux, la galette*."

"*Oh, la galette*," said Henri impatiently, "of course it counts, but there are other things . . . marriage."

"For others, not me."

"If everybody said that . . ."

¹ Cash.

"Well, everybody doesn't, so what are you bothering about? Believe me, find a nice woman, *une femme du monde*, it'll do you good."

"I—you don't know——" Henri began to stammer; he could not give away the fact that his infrequent intrigues did not ravage the smart set.

"Of course I don't know. That's just like you, Duvernoy; you think those things important. They aren't; or they're as important as you think them. My programme's another ten years. . . ."

"And ten affairs?" Henri suggested.

"At least," replied Javal smoothly; "life is short, and there's nothing much in it. I mean to get what I can out of it: money, love, position. Then I shall be thirty-five, find a nice girl with a good little *dot*, and be as good a *père de famille* as you."

"What do you call a good *dot*?"

"Oh, that depends. A couple of hundred thousand francs."

"That's a lot. What do you think of fifty thousand?"

Javal looked at him amazed, then shocked.

"*Voyons*, you're not serious. Fifty thousand francs!"

"Well," said Henri, with an effort, "say fifty thousand francs and beauty and . . . and . . . being in love . . . all that."

Javal exploded.

"But this is ridiculous. Beauty, love, you don't want that in your own wife. It only makes trouble with your friends. You must marry when you've done with all that. *Le mariage c'est la retraite*."

"Not for me," said Henri suddenly; "the girl I want's not got . . ." He stopped and grew very red.

"All over," said Javal mournfully. "Caught. Finished. I understand. Who is it?"

"Nobody you know."

"What do your people say?"

"They don't know either."

"*Hein?*" asked Javal. "Then what? It's the real thing. . . . Well, I always thought you were soft. You'll get over it, old fellow, when your mother finds out."

"I shan't," Henri said defiantly, but with a sinking heart. "As soon as I've spoken to . . . to the *jeune fille* I was talking about . . ."

"What?" Javal roared, convulsed with laughter. "Is that as far as you've got?"

Henri watched him, angry and silent. At last Javal pulled himself together.

"You won't tell me who it is? No? Well, believe me, don't marry a girl with fifty thousand francs *dot*. Even I, who earn two hundred and fifty francs a month at the Lyonnais, I couldn't do it. You, you'll be rich."

"All the more reason; I shall be able to afford it."

"One never can afford to miss having money."

"Money's not happiness."

"No, but it's pleasure, an excellent substitute."

Henri shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here," he said, "that'll do. Let's start while we can get a court."

After vainly pestering him with questions, Javal agreed; they went into the pavilion, a queer wooden structure almost entirely taken up by a large room surrounded by lockers. Half-a-dozen young men were changing into their *costumes de tennis*; already some of them, in white ducks held up by coloured

sashes, fancy shirts and linen collars, stood about in set attitudes, as they rectified in front of the looking-glass the lie of their hair.

"*Ce tennis*," remarked one of them to a friend, "it does derange one's parting."

His friend, equally elegant, poured into his handkerchief a few drops of eau-de-Cologne. The Englishman, bare to the waist, lay upon a couch while a Frenchman massaged his side. He had strained himself, and, at intervals, loudly damned his friend. From another room could be heard the swishing of the shower-bath. At last Henri and Javal were ready. Both dressed in white flannel trousers, one in a soft pink, the other in a cellular white, shirt, their feet shod in rubber-soled but sharp-toed shoes, they made for the courts.

III

The couple had dawdled too long in the pavilion, for all the courts were tenanted. Under the glowing sunshine five doubles and two singles were proceeding. From beyond the courts they could see the players, little splashes of white or light colours on the dark beaten earth. Javal carefully selected a court where he had seen the same four playing before they went out of the pavilion, then sat down with Henri on the neighbouring bench, his coat pulled over his shoulders. As they smoked their cigarettes they could watch the indifferent game. Three young men played with a short, plump girl, all of them badly, all shouting whenever they passed a ball, whenever they lodged one into the net.

"*Ah, le beau smash,*" said the girl, as an accident drove a ball swift as a bullet.

The three young men ran about, busy, eager, all alike almost: short, thin, dark, pale-faced and black-haired. From the last court the monotonous voice of the umpire could be heard as he sat over a match.

"*Trente—Love, Lavaux mène.*"

Then cries from one of the young men as a ball passed him. "A hole in my racket!"

There were laughs at the customary pleasantry. The girl's side was practically beaten, for the sixth game was going against her. Still they fought at deuce, four times returning to equality.

"They'll never be done," said Javal gloomily.

"Oh yes," said Henri the optimist; "accidents happen."

Still the weary game went on. The umpire called, far away: "*Quarante—Trente, Dallin mène.*"

Idly Henri watched two young men at the next court who were waiting their turn. They stood comparing their muscles, proudly compelling them to appear under the shirt-sleeves. One, a tall, fair youth with a long, projecting nose, threw them a quick glance to see whether he was observed; meeting Henri's eyes, he squared his shoulders.

"This victory of yours is a Malplaquet," cried the girl, as she ran.

She, too, cast a look at Henri and Javal whenever she hit a ball over the net; her partners also sought appreciation; they even tried to extort it from the young couple whose muscles were so important. But suddenly Henri observed them no more. His roving eyes had caught sight of a familiar figure . . .

could it be? No; she was not so short . . . and yet . . . Coming down the path, between a lady in grey and a tall girl with a swinging gait, whose coloured face underlay a shaggy bush of black hair, was a slim girl who walked with deliberation and slow, her small hands crossed over her racket, her eyes lowered and fringed with black. They drew nearer, and a hot wave of excitement passed over Henri.

"*Enfin*," muttered Javal, as the cry, "game and set," delighted his ears. Henri took a few steps forward, bowing awkwardly. Madame Bernay smiled; the tall girl put out a large well-formed hand; but Suzanne's little round head sank down on the long neck, after her black eyes had for a second unveiled and her very red lips parted in a smile. Henri recovered his presence of mind with an effort; he was shaken by his emotion, unable to speak or reason while in the zone of Suzanne's femininity.

"*Madame . . . quelle surprise!*" he stammered.

"Just the thing for us," began the tall girl; "we want a court and partners. *Hein, Suzanne?*"

"But perhaps *ces messieurs* . . ." began Madame Bernay; then the tall girl swept her away.

"That's all right? *Hein?* You're not waiting for anybody?" Her dark eyes flashed; she tossed her mop of black hair. The hard tones of her voice were all assertion, struggle for life.

"*Certainement*," said Henri; "we are delighted, my friend and I. Allow me . . . Madame Bernay, Monsieur Javal; Mademoiselle Bernay, Mademoiselle de Morenda."

Javal bowed, smiled, twisted his little black moustache. Mademoiselle de Morenda had already told

him in two sharp sentences that she would play with him.

"Little men run faster," she said brutally. "Got any balls? Yes, all right. Hurry up, Suzanne."

Suzanne was conducting an intimate conversation about nothing with Henri, while Madame Bernay stood by, benevolent and silent. The sharp voice made them start and blush. Henri laughed happily, and, without reason, Suzanne chimed in.

"How do we play?" Suzanne asked. "Have you settled it, Letitia?"

"Monsieur Javal and I," said Mademoiselle de Morenda.

Javal twirled his racket round, won the "toss."

"We win," said Letitia; "off you go, both of you, face to the sun. Madame Bernay, sit down there. You serve first, Monsieur."

As Henri and Suzanne shyly walked away under this vigorous stage management, the young man was glad that a strong hand had settled difficulties which his disturbed mind could not have struggled with.

"She has energy, Mademoiselle de Morenda," he said, with a laugh.

"She wants it, poor girl," said Suzanne. "She is not happy, believe me."

"Ah?"

"No; the only daughter of a widow, no *dot*, not many friends."

"I suppose that's why she does not hesitate to capture people at sight." The dark eyes looked reproachful.

"You are not very kind, Monsieur Duvernoy. You do not understand how hard things are for girls like her."

"Oh yes, yes," protested Henri, "I do, I do." He did not understand in the least; indeed, he had forgotten Letitia; he could only think of that red mouth which had just pouted with irritation.

The excitement upset his game; with despair in his heart, he vainly tried to pick up Javal's detestable screw service. He nearly fell on his face on a back-handed return. Mademoiselle de Morenda laughed.

"*Oh, la, la*; you are finished." And they were, for Letitia, by a powerful half-volley, neatly placed the last ball between her opponents.

Henri was serving now. He had pulled himself together, and Suzanne, at the net, had little to do, for the other side returned steadily to the base line. As she ran to and fro she had a pleasant vision of Henri, his light-brown hair tumbled, his mouth open, his blue eyes flashing with excitement. And as she placed a ball on his racket, she saw, with a little thrill, the golden down on his round white forearms. The game went on, animated by a double energy: Letitia's, whose thick jaw had set into a hard line, for her fighting soul could not bear to lose; Henri's, who was unconsciously fighting for his Lady. Suzanne and Javal, less passionate and less able, naturally fell into the background, neglected balls with a look of appeal in their eyes, fetched supplies from the stop nets.

In the intervals of the game Henri looked at Suzanne. She was exquisite now; so dainty in her white drill blouse and skirt, and so light, so fairy-like; but the fairy had a sweet plenitude of form. Suzanne seemed to ignore his glances; at times she smiled at her mother, who sat by the net watching the game.

Fortune, however, turned against them; Suzanne lost her service, and Letitia, with four balls as lucky as they were hard, won the set by six to three.

"*La revanche, la revanche,*" cried Henri.

They changed over, in spite of Madame Bernay's protests that Suzanne was getting overheated.

"She'll catch cold," she wailed.

"*Mais non,*" Letitia settled; "you wrap her up in cotton-wool."

The new set proceeded at the same quick pace. The rallies were few, most of the balls going out or refusing to rise at all. The two sides were neck and neck; excitement seemed to grow on them. Javal's black hair hung matted on his forehead, while Letitia, with an Amazonian sweep of her arm, had burst the buttons of one sleeve. Suzanne ran for Henri, wildly excited and yet trembling; she was inconceivably disquieted by this big fellow, whose cheeks were now bright red, by his gay smile. A ball rolled to her feet; as she bent to pick it up, Henri thrust out his hand. . . .

For a second neither realised what had happened. Then Henri knew that their hair had mixed, that his cheek had for a second touched the hot smoothness of her own, that his nostrils were full of a sweet, reminiscent perfume, that he did not dare look at her. They played now automatically, avoiding one another's eyes; but by some tacit and exquisite understanding Henri no longer placed balls on her racket; he handed them to her, and a thrill passed through him every time her finger-tips touched his. At last the game came to a close; by luck more than skill Henri seemed to triumph; he pressed Letitia, unmercifully returning balls towards her feet or viciously straight at her

body. They won. A happy smile was on Suzanne's lips.

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" she said. And he knew that she meant, "You won for me."

The conversation lay mainly between Madame Bernay, Javal and Letitia, for Henri and Suzanne were still quivering with excitement. Then Monsieur and Madame Duvernoy arrived to meet their son, for it was nearly four o'clock. The increase in the size of the party further isolated the young people.

"*Tiens,*" said Madame Duvernoy, "there's *la petite* Stein. Do you know, Madame, she's going to marry Monsieur de Vieilleroche?"

"So they say," said Madame Bernoy. "Well, well, she's very rich."

"She'd have to be," said Monsieur Duvernoy, who affected innuendo.

"Yes," added Madame Duvernoy; "and they say she didn't want to marry him; that she wanted to marry a cousin of hers, somebody called Levi or Isaac, or something of that kind. Ridiculous! Why, in my time one married anybody, and knew one could console oneself after."

"Marthe!" said Monsieur Duvernoy severely, as Madame Bernay began to laugh. "Really, there are jokes . . ."

"Oh, with us it was exceptional."

"It's always exceptional," suddenly said Mademoiselle de Morenda, turning away from an apparently absorbing conversation with Javal. "My marriage will be, at any rate; I intend to marry whom I like, or nobody. If I'm an old maid, well, there'll be a man who's missed happiness, *voilà tout.*"

"*Voyons, Letitia,*" Madame Bernay expostulated.

"Oh," sighed Madame Duvernoy, "you are frank, Mademoiselle. This English education is costing us our daughters."

"Pardon me, Madame, it's costing you *la jeune fille*, and a good riddance," said Javal in smooth tones.

"Oh, Monsieur . . ." cried both women, while Monsieur Duvernoy shrugged his shoulders and muttered something about *doctrines immorales*; but Letitia threw herself into the fray.

"Yes," she cried, "you are right, Monsieur. It's about time we had done with *la jeune fille*, who marries as she leaves the convent not knowing what marriage is, but knowing, six months after, what a lover is. We know what she's worth: her downcast eyes, which see nothing until they see evil, her André Theuriet public reading and her private Pierre Louys, her delicacies, which make her call tennis indecent, but don't prevent her from going to a dance dressed as if she were going for a bathe, while her mother watches her and her . . . admirers. Faugh! I'd rather be an old maid than be like . . . like . . ."

"Like me?" said Suzanne, with a laugh.

"Do not be ridiculous, Letitia," said Madame with some asperity. "Really, you say things you shouldn't sometimes."

"Well, I only said them in reply to what you said behind me."

"Oh," said Madame Duvernoy, "that's different. . . . It's . . . you're not . . ."

"Not supposed to hear!" Letitia almost screamed. "Listen to that, Suzanne, and you, Monsieur Duvernoy, and you, Monsieur. There's the *jeune fille* business for you. To hear and not to understand! To

pretend! To pretend to be silly, pure-minded, innocent! And for what? For the sake of offering the *blasé* palates of our old young men, when at last they condescend, the novel refreshment of simplicity!"

Monsieur Duvernoy jumped up with an angry gesture. Suzanne and Henri blushed scarlet, while Javal laughed, rather cynically, as he looked with appreciation at the girl's handsome defiant figure. Letitia regretted her last sentence as soon as she had spoken it, and tried to make amends, for she realised her precarious position in society; but the two women practically refused to speak to her. They drew aside and confided to one another that Letitia was becoming impossible. Javal gently thrust himself between the older people and Letitia, to whom he began to talk in low tones, so that Henri and Suzanne were alone.

"I hate to hear Letitia talk like that," Suzanne muttered hurriedly.

"Yes," said Henri; "it does nobody any good, and it'll do her harm. Why, any man would think twice before asking for her hand."

"I suppose so," said Suzanne; then, as if musing, "Yes, I suppose men want us to be gentle and submissive and . . ."

"Pretty."

"Yes, pretty and elegant, and good housewives. And those who aren't all that?"

"Some are," said Henri, with unpremeditated boldness. And as he looked into her eyes she blushed at the clumsy compliment; even her small ears and her little tip-tilted nose glowed.

"Shall I see you on mother's day?" Henri asked suddenly.

Suzanne's eyes veiled quickly.

"Perhaps," she said hurriedly; "and we are giving a dance soon. But please speak to Letitia," she faltered. "*Oui, maman*, I am ready."

Henri was now her accomplice. He must speak to Letitia, but—delicious thought—he was plotting with Suzanne. He did not, however, have to speak long to the handsome virago. The Bernays and the Duvernoys were convulsively trying to find out whether the others were going, for it was now four o'clock, and the horrible possibility that either family might have to pay for seven teas at a franc each was looming on their respective horizons.

"We must go," said Madame Bernay and Madame Duvernoy together.

"Yes," added Monsieur Duvernoy, "we must call on friends in the Avenue Henri Martin."

"Charming people, *les Michailopoulo*."

"Ah, yes," said Madame Bernay, "I have met them. Suzanne, come and put your hair straight."

The party broke up quickly, for the elder Duvernoys were really about to pay a call, while the Bernays had to return home, having saved their tea, to dress for the stalls at the Vaudeville.

"*Au revoir, Monsieur*," said Suzanne.

"*Au revoir, Mademoiselle*," Henri mumbled. He had held her small hot hand in his a second longer than Mademoiselle de Morenda's—a second, an immense, a crucial sound.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

L'AMOUR

I

HENRI DUVERNOY had in a sense left a life behind him. He loved and now desperately knew it. He felt that he was in her hands, her little hot hands, the soft feel of which still haunted his palms, but he did not rest there easily. They held him, and it was delicious that they should; they evoked other images, Suzanne with her head on his shoulder, looking with him at the harvest moon, Suzanne with her arms round his neck, her lips upturned and expectantly waiting his kisses; Suzanne his wife, more intimate still, the harbour of his hopes, the mother of his children. And above all floated the principle of Suzanne, something wonderfully subtle and eucharistic, perfectly pure and yet intoxicating, the dream of life and its business too. But, as he walked the streets and thought of her, worked at the *étude* and tried to draw her profile, while he desperately strove to suggest her in dreams, he was haunted by the feeling that all was not well with his love, that it was ill-fated, that he might never gain Suzanne. It was a great grief to him that she had no greater *dot* than fifty thousand francs; he regretted it because, after all, money is money, and you must have it; he regretted it too because he knew very

well that Suzanne's poverty might part them, that his parents might never agree to the marriage.

For several days this thought intruded into the revelry of his soul. He did not analyse it any more than he accepted it; it merely was there and, when it grew too insistent, he tried to thrust it away. He saw himself as he was, a solicitor's clerk earning two hundred francs a month and gaining such experience as would enable him later on to start on his own account by buying a practice. But a practice was an expensive thing; he cautiously inquired from one of his seniors in the office, and heard that he could hope to buy no genuine business under a hundred thousand francs, and that he would want at least twice as much if he was to be assured of a competency. Certainly he would want a hundred and fifty thousand francs and, even then, perhaps it would have to be in the provinces. Would Suzanne care to live in the provinces? Then his thoughts immediately turned to another question: Would Suzanne marry him at all? It occurred continually and infallibly tortured him; it was bad enough that extraordinary difficulties should lie before him, that he should foresee a struggle with his parents and a set-back in his career, but it was worse still that he should not know whether she cared for him at all. How could he have the strength to win her if he did not know whether she could be won by him? This torturing idea was in a sense a great comfort to his uncertain mind, for it helped him to blind himself to material difficulties. When it occurred to him he at once thrust away all thoughts of his people, pondered on his chances of meeting Suzanne, of extorting from her the avowal he hoped for, and when at

last, having conquered and fascinated her (for he was very successful in those mental contests), he returned to practical questions, he would tell himself : "Then I shall speak to my mother, there's plenty of time for that."

He was not, just then, very happy at home, though he did not guess the reason. Madame Duvernoy had not seen everything at the Racing Club; she had not seen their faces touch, nor even their hands cling, but she had felt even more than there had been to see. The atmosphere of the young couple had not left her undisturbed; though her mind could fix upon nothing she realised very clearly that Suzanne was charmingly pretty, that Henri was a good-looking young man, that they liked to look at one another, and that they did not do so with the bold simplicity of people who are nothing to each other. This was enough to make her speculate as to the unpleasant results that might follow upon this new intimacy. She had nothing against Suzanne; had Madame Duvernoy been born a Duvernoy she might have objected to the girl, but the plebeian blood of the Lacours had not been purified by the sisters of the Oiseaux; as it was she did not dislike Bernay and she did not resent his rather doubtful reputation, for after all her father too had won and lost battles on the Bourse. Still, she had absorbed enough of the solid Duvernoy tradition to think that the Bernays were hardly a family into which her son should marry. She knew also that Bernay had no fortune; he might make a great deal at times, but his was the kind of income which was mortgaged before it came in. Probably a lucky deal meant that the situation created by a bad one was saved, and no more. She did not feel that there was any

strength in his fortune; to-morrow he might be a millionaire, but he might be a pauper. Thus, while Suzanne could hardly hope for a good *dot*, she could not even be said to have expectations. No, it would never do. She had a short conversation with her husband and found him on the whole in agreement with her.

"Of course," said Monsieur Duvernoy, as wrinkles formed on his dark forehead, "it would be very annoying. I know Bernay can't give anything to speak of."

"Everybody knows that," replied Madame Duvernoy. "Not more than fifty thousand francs, and when we think how young Henri is . . . well, he ought to get two hundred and fifty thousand."

"Yes," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "still, perhaps a little less . . ."

"No," said Madame Duvernoy fiercely. Her little mouth shut tight and her dark eyes flashed. Deep down in her heart she felt a passionate hatred for this family which was interfering with her peace of mind, which was endangering the prospects of her son, her one loved thing. Ah, if she must see him go, she must sell him, dear, dear, make the thief world pay. She would make it pay the full price for this beautiful godlike being, her only son.

"Well," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "we haven't come to that. Meanwhile, Marthe, *pas d'histoires*. You know what I said about the Damascus railway."

"Ah," Madame Duvernoy burst out. "What does it matter?"

"It matters what it matters. It may be a big thing."

"Henri is a big thing."

"And the railway's a big thing. When Henri shows signs it'll be time."

"It'll be too late."

"It'll not be too late. He will listen to his father."

Madame Duvernoy shrugged her fat shoulders as if to say that Henri would laugh in his father's face, but her husband incidentally carried his point. Of course Henri wouldn't bother about his father, but he'd listen to his mother. So she could be comfortable and let the family draw what it could out of the railway case. Still, she was not comfortable, for she realised that her husband could not be sure of acting for Bernay unless social relations were kept up; indeed she knew that the responsibility largely rested on her shoulders, that she must call on Madame Bernay, drink her tea, admire her frocks, praise Suzanne and, by replying to the questions that courtesy would dictate as to her son's health and doings, feed the dangerous flame in the breast of the enchantress. She would have to dine with the villains, meet them at the houses of her friends, bow, chat in the Allée des Acacias; she would have to see them at her Wednesdays and smile as they delayed, while she watched the clock and knew that every minute Henri's return was becoming more likely.

The atmosphere in the Rue de Marignan became all the more electric and affected every member of the family. Monsieur Duvernoy alternated between fits of sulkiness when he was speculating as to his wife's probable state of mind if the attachment sprang up and fits of irritation when he saw himself losing one of those cases barristers love, a beautiful

case full of letters, summary proceedings, objections, interlocutions, guarantees, estreated recognisances, appeals, Supreme Court proceedings, and fees, fees all the time. As for his wife, she became hysterical, for a Frenchwoman. Her eyes ever tended to follow Henri as he walked, but now her glances were less tender than suspicious; she would look at his good-natured fair face from under her heavy eyebrows and wonder whether he had anything to conceal, whether the disease was already making inroads upon the heart that should be her preserve. If she saw him sit down with a newspaper she suspected that he was only pretending to read so as to be alone with his dream of Her; in those moods she could have torn it from him, screamed, stamped, thrown herself at his knees begging him not to think of Her. At other times she wanted to compete; she would throw her arms round his neck when he returned from the office, kiss him and take comfort in the astonishment in his blue eyes. For then she told herself that he loved her alone, that her love was so strong that it could crowd out any other passion.

As for Henri, he was on the whole very unhappy. Home was not yet a hell, but it was fitful, not restful. He was not at war, but not at peace. He was too deeply absorbed in his passion to realise the cross-currents which flowed round him. Never very observant, he would not have realised them under other circumstances; he would have put down his father's moods to his bad temper, his mother's to her excitability: now he hardly noticed anything. He merely knew that the household was uncomfortable, but this knowledge was merely part of the general *malaise*. For this reason he tended to stay

away from home as much as he could, to arrive late for lunch, to leave early and return but a few minutes before dinner, alleging that there was pressure of work at the office. His mother's reproachful looks and his father's caustic remarks did not clear up the situation for him; they merely fostered in him a natural quality of obstinacy.

New traits developed in him too. For the first time in his life he read some poetry. He had always hated it on account of the extraordinary words poets pick out of the dictionary, the way they twist sentences and the amount of space they require to say that the sky is blue. He now began to think more kindly of poetry, and, having by accident found a volume of Baudelaire, discovered "*L'Hymne*." It fired him in his highly susceptible condition as nothing had ever fired him before. With an intense personal application he found himself repeating on his way to the office—

"A la très chère, à la très belle
Qui remplit mon cœur de clarté,
À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
Salut en immortalité."

One day his father found him poring over the volume.

"*Ah, ah, Monsieur est poète!*" he sneered.

Henri blushed, shut up the book and left the room, passing his mother at the door. His father nodded towards him as he closed the door.

"He was reading poetry."

"What?" Madame Duvernoy placed her hand on her heart.

"He was reading poetry."

"He was reading poetry! *Oh, mon Dieu.*"

The old people looked at one another dully. Poetry, the messenger of doom!

Henri continued to stay away. He found himself more and more often in the Rue de Miromesnil, where the Bernays lived. He knew every detail of their block of flats, the tall white façade, its wrought-iron balconies, the white shutters, the brown-painted door, the soldierly-looking concierge and his fat untidy old wife. Everything in it was like its counterpart in other houses, and yet exquisitely different. He watched the smoke rise from the chimneys and, though it was now May, pictured Suzanne sitting by the fire, picking out his face from among the glowing coals.

He never saw her. Once, at half-past six in the evening, he saw Madame Bernay return carrying a parcel, hurried, tired-looking. He almost loved her, that woman who was of Suzanne's flesh and blood; he had to restrain himself, for he wanted to go and speak to her, hear her voice, which reminded him of her daughter's. But he did not go, and Madame Bernay disappeared under the porch. There were mad moments when he thought of calling at the flat; he even climbed a flight of stairs once, then rushed down again, feeling that all would be lost if he were caught.

He slept badly, read more poetry, tended to grow more gloomy. Still his uneasy mother feared to speak, for she might have precipitated a crisis. At last, one afternoon, as he sat in his office, his hopes at their lowest, he conceived a daring plan. He obtained leave to go, took a cab to the corner of the Rue de Miromesnil. He stood there a second, solitary, very frightened and deliciously elated, as he

clutched tightly in his hand a sealed note. As he walked towards the house his courage seemed to dwindle. He stood before the *concierge*, conscious only of a quiver in his knees.

"*Oui, Monsieur?*" said the woman.

"I want . . . Mademoiselle Bernay," he said in a strangled voice.

"Second floor, Monsieur, but the ladies are out."

"Yes, . . . yes . . ." he muttered, "it doesn't matter. . . ." Then he plunged: "I want you to give this note to Mademoiselle Suzanne . . . to her personally . . . you understand?"

The woman swept her untidy hair from her brow and looked at the note, then at him doubtfully.

"*Mon Dieu, Monsieur* . . . I hardly know if I . . ."

"Please . . . *tenez* . . . here are twenty francs . . . I pray you, Madame."

The woman smiled, took the money.

"Well, well, I too, I've been young."

She sighed. Henri muttered a few broken words of thanks and rushed away. His feverish brain repeated again and again the sentence he had written—

"I love you,

"HENRI DUVERNOY.

"Write H. D., Bureau 36."

II

Henri called at the Poste Restante as early as possible after breakfast. The post office was not on the

direct route to his office, so that he had time to experience most of the sensations that are open to a lover; he hoped with extraordinary intensity, he despaired when he realised his unworthiness, trembled to think that she might censure him, that she might even ignore him. It was, he felt at once, certain that she would reply, for she must love him; certain that she would not, for what could he be to her? The morning was fresh; a sharp breeze fluttered the foliage on the chestnut trees, which were now growing bushy; the pale spring sunlight made the grey paving stones look white, the figures of the maids alert; the dogs trotted rather than walked, and even the cab-horses acquired some jauntiness. Henri strode along, his broad shoulders squared, with light in his blue eyes, an upward twist in his little red moustache; a *trottin* on her way to some shop in the Faubourg St. Honoré glanced at him approvingly, but he had no eyes for little workgirls.

It was only when Henri stood in front of the grating at the Poste Restante that he realised how heavily his heart was beating against his ribs. It was some time before he could make up his mind to attract the attention of the splendid bureaucrat who lolled behind the grating, reading *Le Matin* with the great air of those who administer against the people the people's laws. Henri looked anxiously at the presence, who wore an exceedingly tight black coat, a high collar, a waxed black moustache. At last he coughed, mumbled his initials. The bureaucrat languidly examined a mass of letters; Henri watched the slow dwindling of the pile of yellow commercial envelopes, "pneumatic" letter cards, blue telegrams, and letters in pink or blue covers; a faint scent

of perfume rose towards him; letter fell on letter, still nothing happened, his heart beat quicker . . . and there were three, two . . . one.

"Nothing," said the official. He did not waste even a single glance on the applicant, took up *Le Matin* where he had left it. Henri found himself outside the office, horribly alone.

The work at the *étude* Berquin was unfortunately not so strenuous as to absorb Henri's thoughts. He made desperate efforts to bend his mind to the summarising of the common points in two mortgages, and then did it all too easily; all through his task, as he noted similarities in charges and liabilities for repairs, his brain was racked by conflicting questions. Was she angry? or ill? or had the *concierge* destroyed the letter? or perhaps her mother had found it? This opened horrible vistas. Perhaps he had compromised her, made her hate him, ruined his own chances. On the other hand, perhaps it would be a good thing if he had compromised her: it would make matters easier. He was rather shocked when he discovered himself thus reasoning like Bel-Ami himself, for Henri was essentially a "nice" youth.

The day dragged on wearily. Though it was not hot the *étude* was stuffy, for its windows were never opened save in the middle of August. Round him the four other clerks sat at their work without zest; at times they diverted their minds by reading up in law digests the reports of the "in camera" parts of famous divorce cases. Henri looked at them with pity, at old Loupil, the chief clerk, whose short-sighted eyes stood forth from his head like those of a lobster, at Sarmin and Morel, who had ten years'

service and could look forward to thirty more at the same salary; at Varnier, the gay, rosy-faced boy, whom he could see from the corner of his eye reading the *Froufrou*. He wondered whether they loved, had loved; he could not imagine that old Loupil had ever had an idyll before he settled with Madame Loupil in their cheap villa at Asnières. And Morel and Sarmin? Bachelors both, could there be any beauty in their illicit pleasures? or in Varnier's? No, at least he knew Varnier's, for the boy was adored by the smart parlourmaids of the Avenue de l'Alma. All of it, the pity and the poverty of it, made him realise how favoured he was by fate, for he loved beautifully and high.

The evening brought him no peace, for there was no letter for him at Bureau 36. His depression was so intense at dinner that his parents remarked on it, suggested that he might be ill, without daring to approach what they felt to be the probable reason. Monsieur Duvernoy tried to draw him by reviling the policy of M. Combes, but Henri did not respond. After dinner all sat in the sombre dining-room; the little gilt clock ticked slowly; the shadows thrown on the polished panels of the immense sideboard trembled as the light of the lamp flickered. It was a silent party; Monsieur Duvernoy sat in the big arm-chair on the left of the tall painted stove, intent on the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, while Madame Duvernoy, at the head of the table, waded slowly through the weekly books, which she was transferring to her general accounts ledger.

Henri watched his parents with a moody air. He hated to think that there was between him and the mother he adored a secret he dared not entrust her

with. His father did not trouble him much; he could look at him with detachment as he sat with his brow wrinkled, absorbing some dull article about the iniquity of England and Germany or the futile excavations of Druidic altars in the Morbihan; he could see him as a hard little man with blue eyes, a perky grey moustache and a thin bad-tempered face; he knew him as domineering and, though he argued well, retrograde and unsympathetic. But Henri's mother was quite another thing. She sat stiffly in the hard chair, her flat back parallel to its preposterous colonnade, a picture of decision and business ability. Her well-kept round hands checked off the items, segregated them at great speed under their proper headings. Henri looked at her smooth round face, its restful gravity, at the energetic curves of her small mouth. He felt that he had loved her as a little boy when he could tell her he had hurt himself; but now he could not tell her.

She looked up, smiled in a rather forced manner.

"Well, Henri? What is it? You have nothing to do?"

"*Non, maman*, I am rather tired."

"I suppose they asked you to do an hour's work," sneered Monsieur Duvernoy, as he raised his eyes from the review.

"Jules! Do leave the boy alone. I'm sure he does his work very well. Don't you, Henri?"

She threw him a half-inquiring, half-appealing glance. Oh, what was he thinking of?

Henri did not answer, went to the balcony, looked out over the yard towards the distant Eiffel Tower as it thrust out over Paris its white, blue and red searchlights. It was a lovely starlit night, such a

night as he would see on the honeymoon when he had won Suzanne. Behind him he could hear his father's short answers to his mother's questions. She wanted help to unravel in her accounts a tangle produced in her dress allowance by the sale of an old fur coat to a dealer in cast-off clothes. Her husband merely made contemptuous references to the commercial incapacity of women without trying to help her. Then he shut up the review and came to Henri's side. For a moment they said nothing, but Jules Duvernoy threw sidelong glances at his son. He loved this boy in his peculiar grudging way, though he hated him a little because he loved him. He was glad that the boy was big and healthy, jealous because he himself was undersized. It was a satisfaction to feel himself cleverer than his son, though he would have felt proud to be the father of a genius. But now he hated him more than he loved him, for he was conscious that something splendid had come into his son's life, something he had not known. Much of Monsieur Duvernoy's bitterness came from the fact that he knew he had not succeeded; he was not great, like his ancestor the *émigré* judge, nor well known like his own father, Émile Duvernoy. He was merely a barrister who made *au Palais* a respectable living. He had failed at the Bar and he had failed in love. He had never loved Marthe Duvernoy; she had made him an excellent wife, and that was the end of it. He could hardly bear to think that Henri had stumbled, as fools will, upon a paradise.

"Fine night, *mon garçon*," he said at last, forcing himself to be cordial.

"Yes, it's a fine night. Summer is coming."

"Do you get your holidays in August?" asked Monsieur Duvernoy. "We're going to take a villa at Dieppe this year."

"Ah?" said Henri, without any show of interest.

"Yes," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "it's more comfortable than an hotel, don't you think so?"

"*Oui, papa*," Henri replied, without noticing that his opinion was asked for, an unusual thing.

"You are very *distract* to-night, Henri," Monsieur Duvernoy said, his sardonic manner suddenly returning. "It's 'ah' and '*oui, papa*'; haven't you anything else to say? I might tell you we were going to move into a flat at Charonne, for all you care."

Henri did not answer. He had nothing to say. Monsieur Duvernoy became angrier and angrier, charging his son with being a *poseur*, with gaping at the stars instead of realising the serious business of life, with having detestable Socialist theories which would be disastrous if they were not idiotic. Yes, idiotic.

"And it's not only that," he went on, "for the last fortnight you've been going about with a face as long as a day without bread. There's nothing the matter, is there? Mooning about . . . reading poetry, all that sort of thing. I suppose you're going to be æsthetic, eh? Got *des peines de cœur*, *hein*?"

Henri wheeled about suddenly.

"I'm going to bed," he said harshly. As he made for the door his mother's voice called him back.

"Henri!" she said reproachfully, as if shocked.

The young man hesitated, then came back, kissed her and, after a second's hesitation, deposited a perfunctory kiss upon his father's forehead.

III

Henri, who had much to learn of life, received a lesson the next day. He discovered that it is not easy to obey one's will. His impulse, as soon as he had finished his chocolate and roll, was to rush out and go to the Poste Restante; he even set out early enough to call there, though he was assailed by doubts as he went down the stairs. He wondered whether it were worth while to affront the magnificent bureaucrat; in some moods he saw himself proudly bearing his letter away, having therefore triumphed over the creature, but in others he was as the day before, expectant, stuttering and crestfallen as the expert fingers vainly searched through the letters which other women addressed to other lovers. He see-sawed awhile in the porch while the *concierge* ceased to sweep, rested his weight on his soft broom and congratulated him on the splendour of the day. At last he decided not to go, so as to give Suzanne a good chance, started, was drawn to follow a turning which took him past the blue lantern, resisted valiantly and entered the *étude* Berquin with a sigh which was almost one of relief. It was early; alone Loupil sat at his desk, drawing over his sleeves his shining alpaca protectors.

"You are very early, Monsieur Duvernoy," said Loupil, as he peered at him with his bulging eyes. "Good habit, good habit for a young man."

"I'm afraid it's not a habit, Monsieur Loupil."

"Well, no, perhaps not. If you lived as far as I do you would always be punctual. Not that I want to leave my villa," added Loupil, with some pride.

"Ah, country life, there's nothing like it, Monsieur Duvernoy! You should see my garden at Asnières. It is a bower, a real bower in the summer time; lilac, begonias, petunias, jasmine . . . the bees come miles to use it . . . and vegetables! You Parisians, you don't know what vegetables are. Isn't that so, Monsieur Sarmin?" he cried to the new arrival, "you've tasted mine."

"Yes, quite true, you are a horticulturist born, Monsieur Loupil," said Sarmin, as he sat down at his desk. Sarmin was thirty and looked forty; he was growing bald and there was weariness in his loose mouth. Old Loupil went on, waving his arms, seizing his skull-cap to instance the size of his tomatoes, while Sarmin winked at Henri and Varnier made behind the old man's back a discourteous gesture. Little by little as Loupil's scanty breath failed they imposed their own topics. Sarmin told a lengthy story of how he had picked up a pretty *mannequin* in the Rue de la Paix.

"Ah," he ended disconsolately, "that was a woman, *mon cher, une femme épatante*.¹ I shall never find one like her again; it's quite as well, though, women like that spoil all the others."

"Ah, ah," Varnier laughed.

"Yes, laugh away, young bantam cock," said Sarmin angrily. "You'll see when you're older."

Henri, for whom old Loupil's garden had been the ordeal a subordinate must undergo now and then, felt sorry as he saw Sarmin and Varnier face to face. The elder man, with his dry skin and dull eyes, had begun on a note of anger and ended with a bitterness that was full of regret. His words had suggested him

¹ "A stunner," "a peach."

as the cheap *viveur*, who had known nothing but facile and sordid pleasures unworthy of the name of joy; his princesses had been shop-girls, whose index finger the needle had dented—worse even, those who need no conquering. He had never known, nor had Varnier ever known, this pretty youth whose freshness was being spent on his low amours with a class that was not his own. And they would never know, for they were worse than poor, they could not imagine the heights that love can rise to. Then Henri forgot them, for he realised that heights were fatal: a classical reminiscence made him think of Icarus. Icarus, he repeated to himself, yes, he fell! But his memories were muddled; he forgot the manner of Phaeton's death and compared himself with an unhappy Icarus driving the steeds of Apollo.

The feeling of doom settled on him, ground him down. It swathed him in a grey pall as he sat in his office and listened to the regular scratching of Morel's pen. Morel was a beautiful writer; he was fat and dull-looking; his broad pale face was set into a discontented frown, and it was a wonder that his short fingers with the dirty nails could accomplish such artistry. For a long time Henri watched him engross; he sat in a twisted heap, his head on one side, his tongue protruding a little; he swayed gently with the movement of his pen. He looked up at Henri with a bad-tempered and questioning air. The young man looked away, tried to concentrate on a draft marriage settlement so as to drive out the thought that Suzanne might not write. In these moods he passed the day; it was desperately slow in spite of the lunch interval under his mother's suspicious eyes; the afternoon flowed like a sluggish river.

As time passed his depression increased; even six o'clock did not cheer him: he mumbled his good-byes, arrived at the Poste Restante in a state of numb despair.

He looked at the black door as it swayed, dallied with fate, read the notice excluding dogs, the list of penalties applicable to those who spit. Then he sighed, entered, and at once his heart was banging, his blood racing; he felt hot . . . oh, if she wrote. . . .

"'H. D.?' I will see, Monsieur." The splendid bureaucrat was at his post, as bored and aloof as ever. He seized a pile of letters from the little grated box, settled himself before them. Henri could have stamped with rage as the man worked his shoulders free in his tight coat and stroked his black waxed moustache. The letters dwindled under his hands; from thirty or so they shrank to ten; Henri clutched at the smooth oak counter; the words "Poste Restante," standing out white on the blue glass slab, danced before his eyes.

"*Voilà, Monsieur.*"

A voice had spoken out of the haze. He was outside, walking quickly with something in his hand. He stopped to look at it: a plain white envelope of a rather cheap kind; on it "H. D." in fine sloping letters. He had it. She had written. She loved him. She must love him. Then a sudden doubt tore him: perhaps the letter forbade him to write again. His wild eyes looked for a shelter where he could read in peace. A little café was before him, just four tables in front of a *marchand de vins*. He sat down under the awning, and by a prodigy of concentration ordered a *cassis à l'eau de seltz*.

The letter was short. Suzanne addressed him

chillingly as "Monsieur" and went on to reproach him gently for his daring. He read that "he would get her into trouble," and his conscience pricked him, that "if he really meant it he must speak to her father," and this was a ray of hope. Then another sentence told him that "he ought not to have done it," and again he saw himself about to be driven away. But she signed "Suzanne," not "Suzanne Bernay," and below was the postscript, the essential postscript of French girls: "Do not trust the *concierge*. One never knows. But enclose your letters in an envelope addressed to Jeanne Bréguet, the *femme de chambre*."

Henri's chest expanded . . . he wanted to shout. She would let him write again; she almost asked him to; she facilitated it. "*Oh, Suzanne, ma petite Suzanne, ma bien-aimée,*" he muttered. There was a quarrel behind him in the café between a coachman and a taxi-driver, cries, the crash of a glass on the zinc counter. He did not hear, for again and again he was reading, absorbing into the intimate substance of his sensibility the last dear words.

IV

Henri had recovered something of his equable attitude when he reached the Rue de Marignan. He was even on his guard against an outburst of delight, but joy oozed from him, compelled him to stop and speak to the *concierge*, who sat with his wife and his two daughters outside the porch. The man was reading *La Patrie*; his wife mended a red petticoat, while the two girls giggled and whispered as they

boldly gazed at the passers-by. The street was warmed still, and there was a pleasant air of business about the seed merchant opposite. The *concierge's* cat washed itself at its master's feet.

"*Mimi, mimi,*" said Henri, as he stooped to tickle the creature's neck.

"Isn't he fine?" said the *concierge's* wife proudly. "And good, too. He's caught seven mice in four days. What do you think of that, Monsieur Henri?"

"I think he must be cheap to feed."

"*Oh, Monsieur Henri!*" screamed the three women. "He does it for fun," added the mother. "We feed him on cat's-meat."

"*C'est un marquis, notre chat,*" said the husband, with a laugh.

Henri stood up; he exchanged a friendly look with the bold girls, while the cat rubbed itself against his legs. As he went upstairs he was glad of the western sun that fell slanting on the red and brown carpet, the white walls, and picked out in gold the brass stair-rods. In the hall of the flat, as he let himself in, he found Marie and Charlotte putting the linen away in the black oak cupboard. They smiled at him and he smiled back; he liked his old Marie, who had followed Madame Duvernoy from Lacour's house twenty-five years before, and Charlotte too, though she had a hot temper and usually answered him back.

"What a lot of linen!" he said, with assumed surprise.

"You'll have as much when you marry, Monsieur Henri," said black-eyed Charlotte.

"Ah, yes, when I marry," said Henri lightly, but his heart bounded in his chest. "What lovely linen it is!"

"You may well say so, Monsieur Henri," said Marie, with obvious pride. "Some of it belonged to your *grand'mère* Lacour. It's fine, fine; they don't make it nowadays."

"So much the better," said Charlotte, "you can get as good linen for half the price at the *Bon Marché*."

"*Le Bon Marché!* Listen to that, Monsieur Henri. Those Parisians, they don't know what linen is. Do you know, Charlotte, that you can draw one of these tablecloths through a ring the size of a five-franc piece?"

"Well, do you want to?" asked Charlotte, with an air of simplicity that infuriated the old servant. Henri began to laugh.

"You're right, Charlotte. I'm for the new style too."

"If your *grand'mère* Lacour heard you," said Marie severely, "she would turn in her grave."

"Well, she doesn't hear him, does she?" replied Charlotte, bland as ever.

"I didn't say she did," snarled Marie.

"Oh, if you've got no religion . . ."

"Who's got no religion?" Marie asked, with flashing eyes.

"You."

"*C'est pas vrai.*"

"*Si, c'est vrai.*"

"*Non, c'est pas vrai.*"

"*Écoutez, Monsieur Henri. . .*"

"Now, now," said Henri, laughing, "don't quarrel, don't quarrel."

"She said I had no religion," raved old Marie.

"Well, if you haven't I'm right, and if you have

you forgive me, don't you?" said Charlotte, with exasperating amiability.

As Henri entered the dining-room he could hear old Marie stamping with rage. His mother was sitting by the window reading *Le Désastre*, for Monsieur Duvernoy, *Patriote*, *Nationaliste* and *Anti-Sémite*, always bought Maurice Barrés, Déroulède, Jules Lemaître and the Margueritte brothers. As she laid down the book he bent over her and kissed her cheek. Dear little mother, thought Henri; how good and kind she was; so was his father too in his rough way; and old Marie, a second mother, and Charlotte, what a *bonne fille*. Madame Duvernoy looked up into her son's eyes and smiled, for she was overcome by the glow of their blue. He looked alert, gay.

"You seem very happy, Henri," she said, smiling still.

"*Oui, maman* . . . the weather's so fine . . . everybody's so nice."

"I like to see you happy," said his mother; her smile was less definite as vague fears began to assail her.

Henri kissed her once more, but could not sit down. He felt he had to walk about. His mother watched him narrowly.

"Anything new at the *étude*?"

"No, no, nothing."

"How is Monsieur Loupil?"

"Always the same. It's tomatoes, tomatoes all day, except when it's beans."

"I envy him," said Madame Duvernoy. She meant this, for it was in the Lacour blood to till the soil.

"Not I," said Henri. "When I marry I'll live in Paris, that's settled."

"Settled? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, there's plenty of time for that," said Henri quickly. The sudden coldness of his mother's voice had frightened him.

"What do you mean?" His mother's voice was now curiously harsh.

"Oh, I . . . Look here, *maman*. . . ." Henri hesitated, floundered; then at last the joy of the day burst its bonds, he must tell somebody.

"*Maman*. . . . I want to marry Suzanne Bernay. . . . I . . . I'm in love with her and . . . and I can't think of anything else Oh, *maman*, you can't think how happy it makes me. She's so beautiful, and clever . . . don't you think so, *maman*?"

Madame Duvernoy did not reply. Her face had set hard; her small mouth was compressed, her hands were clenched in her lap.

"Don't you think so?" Henri asked again, but his voice was shaking a little. "I would have told you before, but until to-day I didn't . . ." He suppressed the dangerous avowal of Suzanne's feelings. "I didn't want to, until I was sure. Now I know, she's the only woman I ever wanted to marry, and . . . But why don't you answer, *maman*?"

"What do you want me to say?" replied Madame Duvernoy. Her voice was strained. She was suffering keenly as her son unveiled his passion for the other woman.

"Say? Say you're glad . . . that you'll . . ." Henri stopped abruptly. He was frightened. His excitable mother sat as if frozen. Why?

"I can't say that. I am sorry."

"Sorry?"

"Yes. I cannot accept Mademoiselle Bernay as a daughter-in-law."

Henri tried to speak, but the words refused to come.

"I have no objection to her personally," Madame Duvernoy went on, as she fixed on him her hard dark eyes, "but there are many reasons against this match. You are both too young, for one thing."

"Oh, we'll wait," cried Henri in relieved tones.

"There is nothing to wait for. There are other reasons. I do not like the reputation of Monsieur Bernay. No, Henri, please don't interrupt. You know perfectly well what people say about him; I have heard him called a swindler. Besides, everybody knows that Suzanne has no *dot* to speak of."

"I don't mind that, it's Suzanne I want."

"Oh yes," said Madame Duvernoy, "young men always say that, but it is a mother's business to look after her son's welfare. You need not marry for years yet, and then you should marry a nice girl with two or three hundred thousand francs *dot*."

"But, *maman*," Henri exclaimed, "don't you see that I love her?"

"We are talking of marriage," said Madame Duvernoy icily. "Love's all very well, but one wants something more serious for marriage."

Henri looked at her blankly.

"One wants respect, tastes in common, a good social position, enough money. All that will come, and you will find that affection will come with it later on."

"I don't want it later on," said Henri miserably, "I want it now."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous." The mother's voice rang impatient. "I'm sure you can enjoy yourself as

much as you like. I don't ask where you go in the evening or on Sundays. You really must be *sérieux*, Henri, you are giving me a great deal of pain."

"*Maman* . . ." Henri mumbled, "you don't understand."

"Yes I do. And now, Henri, please make up your mind that this must stop. Your father and I will never consent. Later on we shall find you a very nice girl and you will be very happy."

"*Maman* . . . I beg you. . . ." There were tears in the young man's eyes.

"It is no use begging me. I am surprised at you, you, so *raisonnable*! Your head is full of *idées de jeune homme*. You will get over it," she added, with the cruelty of a heart dulled by age.

"Never, never." Henri shook his head; his voice broke.

"*Voyons, Henri.*" The mother melted a little as she saw her son crying, tried to take his hand. At once a flicker of hope rose in his soul. He threw himself on his knees by her side.

"*Maman*, I beg you . . . you don't know what it means to me. . . . I loved her the minute I saw her. . . . I can't think of anything else. . . . If I don't marry her I shall be ill . . . I shall go mad. . . ."

"Henri, Henri!" Madame Duvernoy put her hand on his head. He buried his face in her lap, every one of his sobs hurt her horribly. At last he raised his head again, looked into her face.

"*Maman* . . ." he pleaded.

Madame Duvernoy looked away from his wet eyes, slowly shaking her head.

"Ah . . ." he cried, "I must go out . . . I can't stay."

Henri rushed from the room, running into his father at the door.

"What's this? what's this?" said Monsieur Duvernoy irritably. "What's the matter, Marthe?"

"It's . . . it's . . ." She broke down, buried her face in her hands; he heard her weep.

"But, *enfin*, what is it? *Sacré nom d'un chien*, what is it?"

"It's . . ." Madame Duvernoy pulled herself together. "Henri is in love with *la petite* Bernay. He wants to marry her."

The little man's mouth tightened. His eyebrows rose; his face assumed an expression of dismay.

PART II

CHAPTER THE FIRST

TOUR DE VALSE CHEZ MADAME BERNAY

I

THE Rue de Miromesnil is a street about which there is something. It is what you choose to make it or think it; it is dark and shabby near its centre where the trams thunder past on the Boulevard Haussmann; near the Faubourg St. Honoré its tall houses are cut up into small flats, with which respectable society is not concerned; at that end are the finely official Elysée and Ministère de l'Intérieur, also large old women who push their barrows laden with vegetables as slowly as the *sergent de ville* will let them. The other end, however, beyond the Boulevard Haussmann, has another dignity. The flats seem to grow and broaden, threaten to break out even into those small private houses which no Parisian owns unless he be an aristocrat or a member of the Stock Exchange. There the Rue de Miromesnil is *quartier Monceau*, a district of style and spaces, where the liveries are gorgeous, the horses almost good, the dogs conscious of their heredity. Not too far lies the Parc Monceau, the sole fashionable rival of the Tuileries on the right bank of the Seine. It has old trees, water, some statues, and suggests space by its foreshortened lawns, though a motor-car can drive through it in thirty seconds.

The Bernays had not always lived in this august neighbourhood. When Louis Bernay, twenty years before, married for love and most imprudently, he was content with a three-roomed flat in the Rue Bleue. The Rue Bleue is a street of no importance; the murder of a *concierge* once shed upon it a transient lustre, but otherwise it is a mere alley of straggling shops. Louis Bernay was in those days glad of his three hundred francs a month at the Union Générale, and was happy enough in the possession of his young wife and of Suzanne, then a few months old. The Rue Bleue was not, however, to hold them very long in semi-slumdom; when the copper crisis came and the fall of the Union Générale brought down with it old Lacour and the "Fers de France," Louis Bernay was a fairly large "bear" in copper. How this came about even Madame Bernay did not know; possibly, she liked to think, her Louis had displayed extraordinary acumen; possibly, said unkind friends, Louis Bernay had access to private information and used it against his employers' "corner." Whatever may have happened, Louis Bernay certainly scored: the Union Générale closed its doors and he lost his billet, but he repurchased the five hundred tons of copper he had open with a profit of ten points a ton. He had a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs; he was a capitalist.

Louis Bernay was a man of no mean appetites. He successfully resisted his wife's entreaties that they should invest the treasure in French three per cents. and live agreeably on the resultant hundred and fifty a year in some engardened villa at Montretout. He decided that it would be a pity to waste his youth and Suzanne's chances, announced that he was going

on the Bourse, and that, as a preliminary, he was going to move into a better flat in the Faubourg Poissonnière. Madame Bernay humbly followed him, and, as she was adaptable, soon succeeded in carrying off her increased style. She now had a servant, five rooms instead of three, some Louis XV furniture, and a subscription to *l'Illustration*. Monsieur Bernay always liked to see *l'Illustration* on a Louis XV chair. "It looks well," he used to say.

Monsieur Bernay was fairly fortunate at the Bourse; for several years he averaged a good income as a *remisier*, began to know Frenchmen with German names, a general or two, consuls of Central American states, one senator and several useful clerks at the Colonial Office—briefly, the people who matter. He sold concessions before having bought them, took vendors' shares for kindly floating companies which occasionally survived, but always lasted long enough to enable him to off-load his holding on optimistic investors; he received many a twopence-halfpenny for selling or buying shares and free options on slices of the Sahara. Madame Bernay knew many anxious moments, for her husband was often ruined on paper, but he was now and then a millionaire on paper, and after ten years on the financial switchback she began to take life as it came. Meanwhile, Suzanne grew up into a lanky dark girl. She was educated at a neighbouring *cours*, and, at the age of fourteen, began to promise prettiness.

Then Monsieur Bernay was so finally ruined on paper that he announced to his tired wife that they were living too cheaply. He realised the remains of his fortune, consisting in shares of companies that had been, and, by means of advertisements in provincial

papers, founded a flourishing business as a financial adviser. His advice was mainly to buy his shares; it was so sedulously followed that he was soon able to move into the Rue de Miromesnil. For five years Monsieur Bernay had then struggled with life, sometimes glad to borrow a hundred francs on the steps of the Bourse, sometimes the terror of an ephemeral South American government. He made and lost vast sums, but all through the six thousand francs rent was paid, the four servants maintained, Suzanne provided with English governesses and German piano teachers. Madame Bernay's dark hair was rather grey, but her frocks cost thirty pounds each.

Never had Madame Bernay's adaptability been tested so far as in the early days in the Rue de Miromesnil. Her banking account at a neighbouring branch of the Société Générale rolled and pitched like a ship at sea; the green frontage of the bank was often a haunting presence to be avoided when there were not a hundred francs to her credit, to be affronted when she could draw a cheque for twenty-five thousand. All through Monsieur Bernay insisted on carrying on his household as it was; he pluckily bore on his own shoulders the sceptical judgment of the green-fronted bank.

"Reduce our style!" he said one day in response to Madame Bernay's timid protest. "*Ma chère amie*, how can you talk like that? I am like an unsteady business; if I reduce my advertisements I am done. We may be ruined by spending too much, but we'll certainly be ruined if we spend too little. I prefer to die fighting."

Monsieur Bernay was a Napoleon in his own way, and might have been more successful if he had been

a Fabius. Madame Bernay, who adored him and thought him the best of men, followed in his train and developed the extraordinary aptitudes which are latent in every Frenchwoman. She reduced economy to the fine point where style disappears and squalor begins; she even learned—and this was a triumph for the *petite bourgeoise* she was—to spend judiciously. It was largely her instinctive capacity which governed the selection of their furniture, for she understood her husband's aims. Nothing could have been more significant than the furniture of their flat. The drawing-room was a vastness of white and gold, with enormous mirrors in gilt frames; on the parquet floor lay many imitation Persian rugs. The old Louis XV and Louis XVI chairs, which had once been her pride in the Faubourg Poissonnière, had followed her into the new flat; they were now quite fifteen years old, almost ancestral, but the imitation Aubusson tapestry had worn thin, and Madame Bernay, in utter innocence, had had them re-covered in maroon brocade, which simply shrieked that it represented the year 1830. Mixed with them were aggressive mahogany chairs covered with flowered tapestry, gilt trifles too, stools bought at bazaars. Light maroon taffeta curtains hung round the windows, framing heavy lace blinds. Everywhere the room seemed to burst into ornament: cushions of one colour and of all colours, cushions plain and cushions banded with gold braid, and little footstools with gnarled gilt legs, and tall Chinese pots full of paper flowers, and art pewter pots from Goldscheider, and Rosenburg ware, and Copenhagen ware; here and there little lamps, with coloured shades laden with paillettes; on the walls a copy of a Harpignies landscape, some Louis XVI prints on the edge

of the naughty, a few water-colours, no more atrocious than most of their kind, signed "Suzanne Bernay." Electric light everywhere, in the chandelier, in every bracket, and in a horseshoe-shaped glass held by a bronze smith with a raised hammer in his hand.

The dining-room had been bought as it stood from Waring's, *style anglais*—that is, fumed oak. It always had the air of a boulevard shop, so obtrusive was the blaze of the brand-new plate. In every available corner were vases, received on past New Year's Days; there was a bookcase full of leather-bound books, the lock of which had been allowed to rust. At the windows heavy blinds laden with *dentelle de Milan*, bought as bargains at a sale. The hall was a white wilderness, with red damask chairs and a sofa, a large brass bowl full of visiting-cards. The *petit salon* was a deceptive snuggerly, for it seemed small and cosy until you sat on the tiny chairs, all odd and picked up for ten shillings each or so at the dictate of fancy; one could hardly move in the *petit salon* without upsetting a little table laden with souvenirs of every exhibition and of every charity sale of the last decade. Beyond, squeezed and tortured by the four rooms in which Monsieur Bernay advertised, the living space; a triangular bedroom for Suzanne, with a small window out of which she could not look unless she stood on the table, a larger room for her parents. There were no dressing-rooms; the dark corridor outside the living space was in the early morning filled with boots, over which the servants fell as they brought the hot water.

The life of every day suited the flat admirably. The Bernays had a cook, two maids and a man-

servant. The cook was excellent, and grumbled at her forty pounds a year, for she did not make much out of the *sou du franc*. The manservant, as he polished the parquet floor, made a brave show with his green apron and his black-and-yellow striped waistcoat. But Madame Bernay had developed capacity: her menus were wonderful, for they were permanently keyed up to a high pitch in case pot-luck should disgrace them. Remains of fish reappeared *au gratin* in cunning shells; the cold beef of the previous evening became *viandes froides*, in conjunction with a franc's worth of *galantine truffée* from the pork-butcher's, while none would have guessed that the chocolate *mousse* effect rested on the whites of eggs, the yolks of which had yielded a custard—a *crème*, as the French more elegantly say.

What Madame Bernay did for the house she did for her clothes and those of Suzanne. It did not suit Monsieur Bernay that his wife and daughter should not be smart; it did not suit him either that their purchases should be unobtrusive. Thus each had from Doucet or Paquin—and, in later days, Drecol—one gown a season, which cost some thirty pounds; never was one of these bought until it had been tried on on six occasions, so that Madame and Mademoiselle Bernay might be seen by acquaintances, patiently waiting for their turn in the august *salons*. The gaps were filled in by advantageous purchases of remnants from the Louvre on Wednesdays, or the Galeries Lafayette on Thursdays, while an occasional cheap Liberty fabric became a blouse for Suzanne in the hands of the three-franc needle-woman. Then, too, there were copies of hats and frocks seen at the Skating Rink on unhonoured but pretty people and furs

bought in the summer-time from the cheap furriers of the *quartier Cambronne*.

The efficiency of the Bernays was its own reward. They dined on an average four hundred people a year. Now May was to be honoured by a dance.

II

"*Mademoiselle a eu des nouvelles de Monsieur Henri?*" asked Jeanne Bréguet as she slowly combed Suzanne's hair. The girl's voice was deferential and yet softly imperious; the indispensable link between the two young people liked to make her mistress feel at times that she was a shackle too. She was rather tall, thin, yellow-faced and black-eyed; she had the olive skin that runs to saffron at the temples, where the tight oily black hair of the southerner sprouts. Her teeth, as her thin lips parted, showed uneven and carious.

"Why, you know I have, Jeanne," said Suzanne; "you gave me the letter." She spoke impatiently the first half of the sentence, and ingratiatingly the second, as if she were a horse rearing against the bit and then subsiding into helplessness.

"*Oui, oui*," said the maid; "he is always devoted to Mademoiselle, I suppose."

Suzanne began to laugh. "You want to read the letter, Jeanne. It's a shame. Haven't you got an *amoureux* yourself?"

Jeanne looked at her mistress with a sulky air as she detailed her superior charms. She could not help admiring the long neck, the soft swell of the breast under the dressing-jacket, the mother-of-pearl sheen

under the collar-bones. She reflected savagely on the whiteness of the skin, which was not like her sallow complexion, on the velvety eyes, the long lashes, the thick black hair. And she wondered why that terrible God she worshipped—Jehovah the tyrant, who threatens with boiling oil and lead the lives of Provençal peasants—had given Suzanne everything and her nothing. Mixed with her spasm of hatred was, however, a gentleness such as to make her want to press her lips on the dark hair.

"Non, *Mademoiselle*," she said at last, with a sigh, "and I don't want one. When I go back to Fréjus, in a year or two, I'll have enough to marry on."

"But why marry if you haven't got an *amoureux*?" asked Suzanne.

"You don't want a man to marry you because you'll have two thousand francs." Jeanne Bréguet spoke almost viciously, and Suzanne cried out as she dug the comb into her head.

"That's how it is, *Mademoiselle*. Men are like that: money's what they want; I expect we'll start a café, and it won't be so bad after all. *L'amour*, that's all very well, but life is an *affaire sérieuse*."

Suzanne looked doubtfully at her own face in the looking-glass as Jeanne's hands quickly drew up her hair, crossed the strands and edified on the top of her head, with artifice and the secret aid of a pad, the coil which was in that day's fashion. Yes, life was an *affaire sérieuse*, but still . . .

"One can marry a man one loves, Jeanne; it seems to me one oughtn't to marry unless one does. Why, the idea of marrying anybody because I was just told to makes me feel ill."

"You wouldn't have said that a month ago, Made-

moiselle," said Jeanne as her lips parted and revealed her ugly teeth.

"No—I suppose I wouldn't. You see, a month ago I was merely a little girl in a hurry to get out into the fine big world; I thought that marriage was clothes, lots of clothes, and a flat of my own, and perhaps a carriage, and . . . freedom to go anywhere: La Cigale and the Palais-Royal and—oh, everything."

"But now . . . Mademoiselle is in love."

"Yes, I suppose I am." The laughing lips relaxed into seriousness, and, baby-like, Suzanne Bernay looked into the mirror and wondered whether she was beautiful enough to make Henri want her so badly that he would overcome his mother's opposition.

"You know," she said, "his letter to-day was very miserable. Madame Duvernoy won't listen to him, merely says "No" when he mentions me; she says it's all because I have no money—not much, that is. And they're horrid to him—horrid. They watch him, he says, if he does nothing . . . and his mother's always either embracing him or quarrelling with him . . . and his father is always saying nasty things. I hate his father. Oh, Jeanne, it's awful, awful, all that because I'm poor. Do you think they'll ever consent?"

"You never know," said Jeanne as she planted the last comb. "Oh, don't shake your head like that, your hair'll come loose."

"But what shall we do if they don't?" asked Suzanne.

"I don't know. You must wait patiently, Mademoiselle."

"Wait, wait! I'm sick of waiting." Suzanne

stamped with anger, deliciously pretty in her short lace petticoat and white stays. Her face contracted.

"Now, Mademoiselle, don't cry," said Jeanne in a kindlier tone than she had used before. "Your eyes will be red, and what will he say to-night?"

"To-night?" Susanne smiled again.

"Yes, to-night," said Jeanne, as if talking to a child. "There, let me fasten your dress."

Suzanne obediently stood while the white muslin frock of the *jeune fille* was drawn over her head. Then her white-stockinged feet were shod in small white kid shoes, with paste buckles.

"I wonder whether he'll be glad to see me," she mused; "I didn't write very nicely yesterday."

"What did you say?"

"He's always asking me to say I love him. I said I did not dislike him. That ought to be enough. But still . . ."

"But still you'd have gladly said more," Jeanne remarked rather sneeringly. "Then why don't you? When I was your age, Mademoiselle, I didn't hesitate like that."

"Perhaps you're right," said Suzanne; "perhaps I will. I do love him. And yet it's so difficult, you see; without money one can't . . ."

"Well, I'm going, Mademoiselle," said the maid, with a half-snarl. She was madly irritated by this *bourgeois* exhibition, this regard for money as the base of a society she hated while she battered on it, this harping on the means which are needed to preserve class distinction, to maintain that preposterous system of masters and servants, idleness, uselessness. True, she too was saving a *dot* to buy a man and a

café at Fréjus, but then she was not beautiful like this adorable warped child.

Left alone Suzanne turned over in her mind the recent and momentous happenings: the dinner where he looked so big and so elegant in his frock-coat; the tennis party where he seemed bigger still, and such a man. She was thrilled as she remembered the reddish down on his forearms, the touch of his hot cheek against hers. And then the letters, the first of them so blunt and delicious, for it frightened and conquered her; the others, long, ardent, full of hopefulness and despair—letters that broke into the loveliest verse—

"A la très chere, à la très belle
Qui remplit mon cœur de clarté,
À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
Salut en immortalité!"

How clever he must be, she thought, to write such beautiful poetry for her. She had never read a line of Baudelaire.

He was coming to-night. And not only was he coming, but he was going to dance with her; she would hold his hand, feel his arm round her waist, be held very close to him. How blue his eyes were, how fresh his skin, and how different all about him from the little fops and the shady oldsters who flattered her and whispered half-understood things.

She sat down in the arm-chair, surveying with detachment the little details of her tiny triangular room: the pitch-pine dressing-chest, its few scent bottles, the small white bed piled with linen and garments, the open varnished wardrobe where she could see her best hat reflected in the mirror. She did not move, so intense and physical was her day-dream. Intrusive

thoughts—the opposition of Madame Duvernoy, the chances of success, the unknown facts which maintained friendly relations, the possibility of her mother knowing what was going on—floated through her mind. A voice at her elbow made her start up.

“Are you ready, Suzanne?” asked her mother gently.

Suzanne looked at her pretty mother, her soft grey hair, her low-cut mauve frock. How sweet she was, and yet she could be of no use to her; could not even be safely entrusted with the secret.

“*Oui, maman,*” said Suzanne, with a guilty smile, and quickly she kissed her mother’s cheek.

III

The large drawing-room, which sucked the life-blood from the Bernays’ flat, blazed from every one of its electric bulbs; all the little lamps glowed through their paillettes, and, from plug to plug, long cords carried yet more improvised brilliance. Every minute the *valet de chambre*, clad for the circumstance in evening dress, thundered forth the sonorous names, while two hired satellites in red liveries mutely directed the guests to their respective dressing-rooms. Already groups had formed in the drawing-room, and Madame Bernay, followed by Suzanne, went from the one to the other, exclaiming, exchanging small talk, while her husband engaged in conversation with several elderly men.

“*Monsieur et Madame Samaro, Mesdemoiselles Samaro,*” shouted the *valet de chambre*.

Madame Bernay hurried forward. The consul was

a mass of orders, which tinkled as he walked; his shirt-front was barred by a broad red-and-blue ribbon. By his side Madame Samaro and her daughters, Dolorès and Mercedès, all three magnificent, the mother in orange, the daughters in red, all three bursting into splendid massiveness of olive flesh from their tight low-cut bodices.

"Ah, Madame, enchantée——"

"So amiable of you—we were afraid we were late."

"You were late, for me," said Monsieur Bernay gallantly.

There were little cries, laughter, then the renewed shouts of the *valet de chambre*.

"*Madame et Mademoiselle de Torralta!*"

Two tall thin Spanish women with hatchet faces and straight backs. The mother painted and beautiful, the daughter grave with the austerity of a Madonna. Barheim, the smart youth, who was clean shaven and wore an eyeglass (*style anglais*), hurried forward to meet them.

"*Madame et Mademoiselle de Morenda! Monsieur Jacques Sorel!*"

Suzanne detached herself from the Samaros to speak to her big friend. Letitia looked splendid; her rebellious soul defied even suitability: instead of following the line of least resistance and wearing a fierce colour to set off her black hair she had elected to wear a pale green, and this her splendid flesh lines and towering head managed to dominate.

"*Bonsoir, Madame,*" said Suzanne to the retreating form of Madame de Morenda. The old lady nodded, smiled, sidled away. She had brought her strong daughter to the ball and had nothing to do now but wait for four hours in a corner. "*Tu es*

belle, Letitia," she whispered. "You look like an Amazon about to fight."

"Well, so I am," said Letitia good-humouredly, "*le strügl forr liff,*" you know. *Tiens*, the battle begins, there's Javal; he shall dance with me. *Eh! eh la-bas,*" she exclaimed in a daringly loud voice, "*Monsieur Javal.*"

Javal turned round suddenly, and, nothing loth, came up to the two girls. His pale face and dark parted hair produced an impression of weakness which rather endeared him to the burly Letitia. He was less like a barber than usual; his ready-made white tie and waxed moustache made him look more like a waiter. While Letitia was telling him what dances she required of him, Suzanne was taken away by her mother and introduced to the Duc de Monterrico, a very old man, who, for unascertained reasons, never visited his castle on the Arno and sat on the boards of companies. The *valet de chambre* was still announcing the guests—

"*Madame et Mesdemoiselles Scholtein! Monsieur André Maroux! Monsieur Goldenthal!*"

The room became fuller and fuller; it was necessary almost to shout to be heard. Everywhere little groups of Jewesses, short and stout, dark, hairy-necked; with them their men, all fat and thick-skinned, with pendulous mouths, protruding dark eyes, spatulate fingers; *rastaquouères* too, among the Frenchmen, who seemed small and thin by the side of the dark men and women with the yellow hides and the oily smooth hair of the American Indian; all the *rastaquouères* were there, the concession hunters, the promoters, the planters from Honduras, Brazil and Venezuela, the political exiles from Colombia and Ecuador, and

their wives and daughters, fine, insolent and jewelled like their less fortunate fellows in the dens of Buenos Ayres. Nothing could have been more truly Parisian.

Suzanne and her mother talked hurriedly to all as they came in, but the minutes passed and Suzanne's heart beat faster as she wondered whether, at the last minute, the Duvernoys would refuse to come. The idea made her almost hysterical; she had to pull herself together time after time to respond to the heavy gallantries of Carlheim, to find small talk for the de Torraltas, to reply with commonplaces to the hardly delicate pleasantries of Barheim and Jacques Sorel. Still time passed; the *sénateur* Luizot arrived, creating a little stir among the *rastaquouères*, for his title was real; then Dupont, the Independent Socialist *député*, who might one day be minister of finance. Still, no Henri. Suzanne felt she would cry if he did not come. For some minutes nobody seemed to want her; the South Americans were clustering round the *sénateur* and the *député*; their fierce contest with the Jews had completely thrust out the Frenchmen, who formed little groups of their own round Letitia and the Scholtein girls. The old Duc de Monferrico sat by the mantelpiece, his mouth open and his head nodding as if he were about to go to sleep. Then the trump of the resurrection sounded and Suzanne's dead heart rose—

"*Monsieur et Madame Duvernoy ! Monsieur Henri Duvernoy !*" shouted the mechanical voice of the *valet de chambre*.

The band and piano in the *petit salon* struck up *Amoureuse* as the Duvernoys came in. Madame Duvernoy walked with an air of aggressive weariness.

ness, as if she were entering an enemy's country; there was about her something of the dignity of a Roman matron going to her doom for her husband's benefit, for she was at the Bernays' to keep the Damascus railway case alive. Her husband followed behind, a little shamefaced and hiding his embarrassment under the unusually fierce cock of his grey moustache. Behind came Henri, looking very big-chested, thanks to his white shirt-front; in his blue eyes was a rapt look which turned into a sudden glow as they met those of Suzanne. The girl passed him very close, smiling as she slowly turned in the arms of André Maroux; the bearded youth was smiling too, and Henri felt a spasm of pain as he noticed that Maroux was holding, not Suzanne's hand, but her forearm. He stifled his jealousy, telling himself that this was the way smart people danced *le boston*, but he resented Suzanne's apparent calm, for he did not know that a woman can smile and discuss Sarah Bernhardt when her heart is breaking or her body racked with fever. He was talking vaguely to Madame Bernay now without knowing what he was saying, while his mother's shrill voice hurt his ear-drums; couples passed him by, swinging to the rhythm; Javal, nominally guiding Letitia de Morenda, in reality following her lead; Dolorès Samaro in the arms of Dupont the *député*, who had audaciously placed his gloved hand so high above her waist that his finger-tips touched the firm olive back, and Suzanne with that hateful dirty-bearded Maroux. They flashed past him as he dreamt and stupidly smiled; Carlheim, fat and oily, dancing with a lanky dark girl; and Mercedès Samaro, into whose black eyes Jacques Sorel, a yellow-haired, vicious-looking,

long-nosed youth, was gazing. And Suzanne again; how pale her face was, how red her lips. . . . Ah, she did not seem to look at Maroux now, her eyes were downcast, except at those moments when she passed Henri.

"*Oui, oui, Madame,*" he murmured, "it's very warm for May." Then he found himself gazing with stupid intensity at the Duc de Monterrico; the old man was sitting near the mantelpiece, nodding regularly with a senile smile on his face. At last Henri heard the last strains of the waltz, the finale. He detached himself from his parents, plunged into the throng of men who were returning the girls to the care of their chaperons. He elbowed Sorel's frilled shirt-front, which was almost lace, with savage satisfaction, forced himself past the bowing Maroux. He was speaking to Suzanne now; he saw her blush faintly, heard his own strained voice as he asked for a dance. Madame Bernay, who stood near by, delicate and pretty in her mauve dress, nodded approval.

"*Si vous voulez, Monsieur,*" said Suzanne in a low voice. He remained standing by her side, talking quickly, hardly knowing what he was saying. He caught Letitia's eye; the virago smiled and he automatically responded. Jacques Sorel and Barheim intruded; it was awful, sacrilegious: he hated them both, Sorel and his yellow hair, his long nose, his pimples and his large smiling mouth; and Barheim, his pale face with the smart-pointed chin and slaty eyes. He hated all about them: Sorel's frills, his fluttering tie; Barheim's eyeglass and white carnation button-hole. Dirty Jew, thought Henri, with his white carnations! That's the sort the *Ligue des*

Patriotes and the Royalists and the Clericals pick up with. The young men smirked and struck attitudes. Barheim threw out his fat chest, while Sorel's enigmatic unvirile back undulated as his water-coloured eyes roved over every face.

"Ah, *Mademoiselle*," said Barheim with unction, "I see you like dancing. I could see you swaying while you danced with Maroux."

"Yes," said Suzanne, "I do like rhythm, don't you, Monsieur Sorel?"

"Yes," said Sorel in fluty tones, "rhythm is life. To attune yourself to rhythm is to be happy. *Hein*, Duvernoy?"

"*Oui, oui*," growled Henri, who did not understand.

"Oh, leave life alone," said Barheim, "we were talking of waltzes. Why do you have *Amoureuse*, though, *Mademoiselle*? You hear it everywhere, and like all familiar things it is an outrage."

"True," said Sorel, "nothing is so outrageous as a familiar thing. And nothing is so familiar as an outrageous thing. That, you know, is the experience of life, for life itself is an experience. *Hein*, Duvernoy?" he said maliciously. Henri did not reply, but Suzanne began to laugh.

"Ah, Monsieur Sorel," she said, "your paradoxes are too clever for us." She threw a glance at Henri which caused his spirits to rise again.

"Oh yes, very clever," sniffed Barheim. "Personally I think nothing is so idiotic as wit. There, Sorel, you can serve that up as your own."

While Suzanne laughed again she reflected that Sorel was talking nonsense, but that Henri was saying nothing. She wondered whether she liked him

for it, whether she would prefer him to be witty like these young fools. There was a slight convulsion as *la petite* Stein arrived with her mother, followed by her *fiancé*, the Comte de Vieilleroche. The girl, young and rather pertly pretty, came in with a fine air of rosy assurance, with the languid aristocrat who looked almost too tired to smile. He followed in her train, with the great air of a man who has seen everything and done everything and can conceive of nothing more to try. The Jews and *rastaquouères* parted before the triumphal Stein procession; they almost applauded the commoner's daughter and the captive who trudged behind her chariot. Then the second waltz began; the mellifluous sounds of *Dernières Etreintes* filled the room.

"My dance, I think," said Henri hoarsely.

Suzanne nodded, stood up. A second of awkwardness made Henri pause; he was going to touch her. Then he seized her right hand and roughly placed his arm round her waist. They started. He could not see her eyes, for the lashes were downcast. They twice went round the room before he could dominate the violence of his emotions; he was near her, holding her hand, feeling as he touched her waist the extraordinary intimacy of the experience. All this tied his tongue. At last he faltered—

"Suzanne."

She did not raise her eyes, but he saw her lips tremble.

"Suzanne . . . I love you." He whispered almost into her ear, through her dark hair. Couples passed them, collided with them slightly; the chaperons' skirts brushed Henri's legs as he went by. Henri wondered whether he could resist the longing to

crush his lips into the soft white neck. He could feel her hand tremble in his. At last she raised her lashes and the look of her dark eyes told him all, for they were those of a joyful child which sees a delicious gift and can hardly believe it to be its own. She said a few words, but he could not hear.

"Do you love me?" he asked bluntly.

Again the lashes concealed the eyes, and not even the heavy pressure of the young man's arm could wrench avowal from the girl. With growing despair Henri heard the music become louder as a prelude to the final bars.

"You will give me the next but two?" he almost commanded. Suzanne acquiesced without hesitation. The waltz ended, and Henri found himself surrendering Suzanne to her mother. His left hand still full of the sensation of hers, he walked to the door just in time to witness the arrival of a great man.

"*Monsieur Adrien Pervenche!*" cried the *valet de chambre*.

There was a pause, a semi-silence, coincidental, no doubt, and significant only of the reaction from the excitement of the dance; still, it was a pause, akin to the sudden stop of the orchestra when the gymnast is about to perform his greatest feat. It lasted quite ten seconds, during which the conversation fell and fell, while the people waited. Then Adrien Pervenche seemed for an appreciable moment to float in the doorway like some celestial body materialising for the sake of men.

He stood, the *valet de chambre* a little behind him, the satellites, like red cariatides, to his right and left. He appeared as an immensely tall and thin youth in whom everything—the shape of his head, his neck,

his narrow shoulders and hips, even his pointed, varnished shoes—accentuated the impression of length. His evening-dress moulded his slender waist; his shirt was delicately tucked—tucked, said rumour, into seventy-two tucks by a Moscow washerwoman whose sole other customer was the Czar; the shirt undulated into a waistcoat, which in some lights was grey as an English dawn, in others fiery with an opal's soul; above sat a black silk tie, flowered with black satin butterflies and looking itself like a butterfly fed on the pollen of Stygian blooms. As you looked at Adrien Pervenche you saw other details too, a black silk fobchain carrying a graven amethyst, flat links of silver and purple enamel, socks flecked as a mackerel sky. You saw too a face of extreme aloofness, with fine eyes and a sad mouth; the cheeks had by some curious chameleon-like instinct assumed the mauve hue of that night's composition.

Adrien Pervenche raised to his left eye, with a hand of which every finger-nail was as coral, an eyeglass mounted in ivory. For the space of a second the fine discriminating glance travelled over the assembly, examined Sorel's shirt, the glistening faces of the Jews, the olive flesh of the Samaro women. Then Adrien Pervenche stepped forward, thus relieving the tension, bent low over Madame Bernay's hand, again discriminated among those present, and by a swift insidious movement entered the throng, acknowledging in a manner that ignored the salutations which fell on him as do petitions in the carriage of a king. The *salon* saw that Adrien Pervenche had sat down by the side of his peer, the Comte de Vieille-roche. The silence broke. As if a reaction of glee had infected it the band seemed to realise that the

Prince of the Dandies had ascended his throne; with mad joy it thundered out an alleluian mazurka.

Henri danced the fifth, then the eighth, dance with Suzanne. He hardly kept count of the others, passages of no importance in arms which did not lack beauty but did lack magic. He felt himself tossed in this feminine crowd, making as best he could amusing conversation; Dolorès Samaro curved felinely towards him, caressing him with her soft black eyes; Letitia, dominating and splendid in her desperate defiance of French laws, bore him forward with an impetuous rush which often proved devastating to weaker teams; he seemed thrown from woman to woman—from Thérèse Scholtein, who never said anything, to Sorel's sister, who was so like him that it had become a recognised joke to mistake her for her yellow-haired brother; to Señorita de Torralta, to dance with whom was to hold a furious Arab steed. He danced in the desert, danced, danced, feeling his collar grow limp, his hair matted, a film of heat and sweat pass over his eyes. And then came Suzanne again, the joyful enigma, with her cool crisp lips and little trembling hands.

Along the sides of the room the chaperons watched and analysed.

"Bad style, *cette Mademoiselle de Morenda*," said Madame Duvernoy to her neighbour, the fat Madame Goldenthal.

"Yes," said the lady, with a sigh; "ah, these *jeunes filles modernes*! They respect nothing, go out unattended, believe in no God, and want to marry for love. That's the result of *l'éducation anglaise*, atheism and *les sports*."

"Look how she is clutching *le petit Javal*," said

Madame Duvernoy, who cared nothing for social theories.

"She clutches whom she can," Madame Goldenthal concurred; "but she won't hold him. Not a sou."

"Oh no . . . of course . . . no . . ." Madame Duvernoy was disturbed, for the idea had its application, especially as she could see Henri waltzing with Suzanne. The girl was held close in his arms, her breast touching his shirt-front. "Fool," thought Madame Duvernoy, "I was a fool to come." But her roving eyes met those of her husband, who was talking in the doorway to Monsieur Bernay. The railway, no doubt. . . . She sighed. Then her soul thirsted for revenge, and she turned to Madame Goldenthal—

"*Cette Morenda est une . . .*" she said. Her cheeks flushed a little, for as she turned she saw seated behind her a little washed-out woman in a dress that had once been a wedding-gown. It was Madame de Morenda, and she had heard! But nothing happened, for Madame de Morenda was in training; her lips twitched and Madame Duvernoy lifted her head with an aggressive air.

The party grew merrier, noisier. Adrien Pervenche and the Comte de Vieilleroche still sat side by side without speaking, enjoying the mute sympathy which unites the best-dressed man in Paris and the man with the oldest name. Round them the dancers eddied: Barheim with his pointed chin almost on the rosy shoulder of *la petite* Stein; Jacques Sorel dancing with his sister, as if courting the family pleasantries; and the Torralta girl, wild-eyed now and stamping like a mustang; Letitia very untidy and red, dancing as if she had sworn to tear out of life such joy as time would let her. At times a couple

broke away; Dolorès and Mercedès were conducted to the buffet by the *sénateur* and the *député*, under the vigilant guardianship of their mother. Madame Samaro did not interfere much in what was said, for she found it desirable not to understand French very well. Still, she was there.

At last, as the evening passed, Henri, who was suffering because he did not know, gathered together enough force to break down Suzanne's reserve. They danced slowly, conscious of being afloat together and alone. Before their eyes passed the faces at the side, the old Duc de Monterrico still nodding and senile, Madame Bernay faded and sweet, Madame Duvernoy erect and torn between two passions, Adrien Pervenche and the Comte de Vieilleroche witnessing Olympian the frolics of the mortals. Henri leant over Suzanne, clenching his teeth together in his intensity.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

Suzanne raised her head. He saw a mist in her eyes.

"Answer," he said roughly.

Very slowly Suzanne nodded. But Henri loved her too much not to torture her; he was a lover, thus a potential murderer. The quality of his passion was selfish because it was real.

"Say it," he commanded.

Then the room swam and the lights grew dim; the faces were all blurred together into a whiteness and the music receded far away behind his brain into a muffled chamber where it expired. For Suzanne had whispered—

"Je t'aime."

Henri saw the world again as if he had been in a dark room and a hand had torn open the door, revealing the southern light on a white road.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

FACE À FACE

I

NEVER before had a subject been so carefully avoided in the Duvernoy family as the *affaire Bernay*. The life of every day seemed gently to ebb away, hardly ruffled and on the whole amiable; but its amiability was that of duellists who gravely bow before crossing swords. All were punctilious as those enemies, anxious to be polite so that nobody could have a grievance, watchful for fear that at any moment dignity would demand that friendliness should be transformed into hostility. The relations between the three members of the Duvernoy family were uncomplicated by the intrusion of uncles or aunts; there were some such people, but most of them had quarrelled with their Paris relatives. Mademoiselle Ravier (Monsieur Duvernoy's aunt) and the Lacour cousins, being pensioners, could not be admitted to take part in family differences. Thrown back upon one another to consider a naturally distasteful subject, the Duvernoys tended to exasperate one another by throwing out hints without daring to discuss it. At the bottom both parties thought that the other side would yield. Henri, nerved by the splendid consciousness of being loved, often found it difficult to repress his optimism; he felt assured that his mother

and father would at length recognise the genuineness of his passion and give way. He even imagined their surrender as graceful and generous; he figured his father shaking hands with Monsieur Bernay and kissing Madame Bernay and Suzanne, his mother telling Suzanne that now she knew her better she was delighted to have her as a daughter-in-law. Meanwhile Madame Duvernoy tried to persuade herself that Henri's calf-love would pass away, that he would give up the struggle in despair, or, better still, give it up for her sake; she hoped that in his susceptible frame of mind some woman would detach him, preferably some safe married woman, after which she, the mother, would reign supreme. As for Monsieur Duvernoy, he found it very difficult to believe that Henri was really in love, for he had never himself known the feeling; he hoped that Henri would let the matter drop, at least until the Damascus railway case was properly in his hands.

Beyond a doubt the Damascus business was doing very well. The trouble with the Porte having become acute he had already been retained, and had made some impression in the minor court. Still, the affair was simple enough, and Monsieur Duvernoy felt it necessary to be careful until he had attained at least the Court of Appeal. Once in the Court of Appeal all would be well, for the case would have become so complicated that Bernay would, under no circumstances, dare to take it away from him. He often urged this aspect upon his wife, who heard him with a mixture of sulkiness and greed.

"You see," he remarked one day, "I have already drawn two thousand francs. Not a fortune for Croesus, I agree, but when we're in the Court of

Appeal, where, I hope, we shall stay a year, it'll produce a regular income; after that the Supreme Court, who never hurries, and Heaven knows what complications with the Government. I hope to do so well that . . . even if we had to risk . . . even if Henri . . ."

"No," said Madame Duvernoy fiercely. "If I thought that, Jules, you should throw up the brief."

"Do not be absurd."

"I may be absurd, but I won't have my son sold."

"I won't sell your son. Perhaps they don't want him."

Madame Duvernoy considered the insult for some seconds; then, with splendid lack of logic, she ignored the fact that she would sell Henri to any girl who bid three hundred thousand francs, and snarled—

"They are after him. That's why you've got the case."

"Ridiculous," said Monsieur Duvernoy, shrugging his thin shoulders. "Bernay practically offered me the case before he had seen Henri."

"He may have heard. Those people have their police."

"Marthe, you make me impatient. When Henri is in question you are mad, possessed."

Monsieur Duvernoy was quite right: his wife was possessed. She surprised herself in the middle of her orders, stopping to look open-mouthed at the cook, and wondering whether some ghastly business was going on behind her back, a business organised by the Bernay family, a business springing from some despicable ten-year-old plot. More than ever now she watched Henri, and every one of his moods was a torture: if he was happy she wondered whether

he had seen the girl and was rejoicing in her; if he moped she pitied him with a dreadful concentrated pity, for she could not comfort him, hated him because she could not do so, hated herself because for the first time she had to fail him. She found it impossible to discuss the subject with her husband, for his attitude remained: "I beg you to leave the thing alone and let me go on with my case." Henri she dared not attack, for fear that he should tell her too much. Thus her secret burdened her more than an ordinary secret. If it had been a thing she alone knew, she could have borne it and even gloried in the possession, but she shared it with two persons, without being able to discuss it or see it develop; instead of proving a link, it therefore became a bar. Sometimes the pain became so intolerable that she thought she must talk to old Marie and ask her to support her view, but she feared that the old servant's heart would turn to the boy and increase enmity in the house. Besides, Marie, even if bound by oath, would tell Charlotte, and Charlotte the cook; thence, through the grocer and the butcher, it would reach other servants, and thus her friends. Then Henri would be coupled with Suzanne, discussed, perfidiously seated by her side if they met at dinner, tacitly partnered for tennis. So Madame Duvernoy bravely held her tongue and suffered the penalty.

The difficulty was not, however, one of those which can exist unobserved in a household employing three women-servants, of whom one has twenty-five and another ten years' service. Within the week that followed the dance Charlotte and Marie knew that there was "something"; then the freemasonry of service began to enlighten them; rumours filtered

through by accident. The *concierge* who had delivered Henri's first letter had told everybody she had ever known about *le Monsieur de Mademoiselle Suzanne*; she had, among others, told the Bernays' under-housemaid. The under-housemaid, having called to fetch some documents, had a few minutes' conversation with Charlotte; as soon as the visitor had gone Charlotte rushed after Marie, who was making Monsieur Duvernoy's bed.

"Marie," she cried, "*Monsieur Henri est amoureux.*"

"*Quoi?*" said Marie, amazed.

"*A-mou-reux,*" said Charlotte.

"Who's he in love with?"

"Suzanne Bernay."

"Suzanne Bernay! How do you know?"

"That's my business. Six weeks ago he wrote to her and she's been answering him. Besides, he danced half the night with her. They say he kissed her as they danced . . . as if by accident."

Marie shrugged her shoulders.

"*Ma pauvre Charlotte*, you do believe things. Besides, it's impossible."

"Why?"

"Because . . . *enfin*, *la petite* Bernay has no *dot*. And how do you know they write to one another? He gets no letters to speak of."

Charlotte's black eyes began to dance.

"*Oh, la, la*, you are simple . . . *et la Poste Restante?* Why, I . . ." She stopped rather abruptly, while old Marie drew herself up stiffly.

"I'm surprised at you, Charlotte. All the same I don't believe it."

But she did believe it, as Charlotte believed it, also the cook. Soon the *concierge*, his wife and his bold

girls knew, and Henri could not pass in and out without being fusilladed by eyes; he was looked at, smiled at, almost winked at. All the servants of the eight flats had a twinkle for him. He was most of the time so happy that this did not strike him as strange. And, as the affair spread, Madame Duvernoy grew more conscious of it, seemed to feel it thickening the atmosphere.

Henri very soon felt the effects of the new development. Now his mother surrounded him with ever more loving care, ordered his favourite dishes, treated him to a costly silk tie from Tremlett's. But he found that he was being preached at, indirectly shot at.

"Henri," said Madame Duvernoy suddenly one evening, "Pauline Chavel is engaged."

"Ah?" said Henri, much interested, for Pauline was very beautiful; besides, he liked marriage talk now. "Do I know the man?"

"Monsieur de Castelac. *Un très beau parti.*"

"What?" cried Henri. "But . . . but he's sixty . . . she can't be in love with him."

"Of course not," said Madame Duvernoy, with a gleam in her dark eyes. "Who's talking about that? Of course he's not very young; still he's rich, *distingué*, and has an old title. Besides, he adores her."

"I should say so," said Henri, with a sneer; "anybody would adore Pauline Chavel. But I say that to sell a young girl like that is disgusting. That's what it is—disgusting."

Madame Duvernoy repressed her anger, tried diplomacy.

"*Voyons, Henri*, you're not serious. Marriage is not a thing to be decided like that, by passion and

all that; people must be suited as regards position and fortune; then children come and affection. Believe me, the happiest matches are those which are reasonably arranged."

"So some people say. Anyhow, old Castelac won't have many children, and what will his wife do then with her life?"

"Oh, well . . . perhaps there will be children, and if there are none . . . there are other things; they'll be rich, he has a castle near Libourne, and a motor-car. Besides, she'll be free . . . there are lots of compensations."

"*Maman!*" Henri had understood the suggestion too well and was shocked. Six months before he would have smiled, perhaps have said something rather coarse. Now, however, he was enshrined in a new idealism, saw love and marriage as beautifully pure and final.

"Well, what?" Madame Duvernoy was annoyed, having gone too far.

"You don't suggest . . .?"

"I don't suggest anything. I'm sure Pauline Chavel will make him a model wife. Besides, that doesn't concern anybody: she is a *jeune fille bien élevée*; once she is married it is her husband's affair to look after her. If he doesn't it'll be his fault."

"*Maman,*" Henri submitted, after thinking a little, "don't you think that all this . . . this irregularity . . . comes from people who marry not loving one another?"

"No . . . certainly not. . . . Some women have no self-respect."

"Has a woman no self-respect because she falls in love?"

"Her duty is to her husband. Ah, Henri, you are ridiculous *à la fin*. One might think that I interfered with you, that we were trying to force you to . . . to marry. . . . We don't interfere with you . . . we don't interfere with anything."

"*Si, maman,*" said Henri in a humble voice, "you won't let me marry Suzanne."

"Henri!" The mother's voice was tragic, so angry and broken did it suddenly become. She dominated her feelings, looked round for something to do.

"Let us speak of something else," she blustered.

"*Maman. . . .*"

"*Non.*"

Henri's head bent under the heavy negative. He could think of nothing to say. His spirit remained as if standing in presence of a mental wall which he could not scale.

II

"You will order a thirty centimes black loaf," said Madame Duvernoy, "and . . ."

"Forty centimes, Madame," said Charlotte; "the thirty centimes one will be too small."

"It'll be quite enough."

"*Non, Madame,*" said old Marie; "last Thursday you ran short of sandwiches."

"Well, what does it matter? There were lots of cakes left."

"Some people want sandwiches," said Charlotte obstinately. "What's the good of offering them cake?"

"Oh, you are annoying, Charlotte," said Madame

Duvernoy, who, like Marie, could not withstand the younger girl's logic. "I hate waste; we don't want waste. You might as well throw the ten centimes into the gutter."

"You're not going to throw them into the gutter; you're going to buy a bigger loaf."

Old Marie began to laugh, and Madame Duvernoy, struck by the absurdity of the situation, joined in.

"*Bon*," she said, "a forty centimes black loaf, to please Charlotte, and a Moka cake at one franc fifty from Chaumier. And while you're at Chaumier's you may as well buy a dozen and a half *petits fours* there."

Charlotte coughed significantly. Marie threw her a quick glance.

"Doesn't Madame think . . ." she submitted, "Chaumier is a good baker, but . . ."

"But what?"

"When it comes to cakes, he's only a baker, after all."

"And his cakes are stale," Charlotte urged.

"Stale? How do you know?"

Old Marie smiled, and murmured—

"Madame doesn't remember the day Monsieur Henri was so sick, because he'd bought twenty stale cakes from him for one franc fifty, and eaten them in one morning?"

"Yes, I remember," said Madame Duvernoy softly. Henri was ten when he performed this disastrous feat. She sighed. Why had Henri changed, become a big difficult man? "All the same," she added, "it doesn't follow that because Monsieur Henri made himself sick fourteen years ago Chaumier's cakes are all stale."

"Non, Madame," said old Marie submissively, "*tout de même* they're much better at Colombin's."

"Colombin? You don't think I'm going to run all the way to the Rue Cambon to buy three francs' worth of cakes for four francs fifty?"

"Oh, Madame," said Charlotte, "*c'est beaucoup plus chic.*"

"Hum. Perhaps you're right, Charlotte. All the same, why this new idea?"

Charlotte and Marie looked at each other guiltily. They could not very well say that the weekly "at home" must be better done now that everybody knew that Henri was "after" Mademoiselle Bernay, that Madame Bernay must be shown they were nice people.

"Oh, a new idea," said old Marie vaguely; "*non, Madame.* I've often thought it would look better; besides, that's where Madame Sarlat-Cohen buys hers." This Marie knew to be untrue, but she knew also that if Madame Sarlat-Cohen were asked point-blank where she bought her cakes, she would say "Colombin" or "Rumpelmayer."

"Ah?" Madame Duvernoy thought for a few seconds. Certainly Madame Sarlat-Cohen was a dear friend, but it wasn't nice of her to go to a celebrated pastrycook behind her back. "Perhaps you're right, Marie."

"Shall I go this morning?" asked old Marie eagerly.

"Yes, or rather no; I'll go. You go to Chaumier for the Moka cake, and I'll get eight or six *gâteaux noix de coco*, or . . . wait; no, I'll get four *tartines Renaissance*; you can cut them in two, and they cost the same."

Charlotte and Marie dared not protest, having already scored so heavily. They obtained that both tea and chocolate should be served, and it was later on discovered that, on their own initiative, they had provided tumblers and iced water, to be drunk after the chocolate, *à l'espagnole*. There was no revolution in the Duvernoy household, for Madame's day was every Wednesday but the last in the month. Given the habits of the young men, who usually entered the drawing-room with their hats and sticks, there was no need to provide a cloak-room. The food question being settled, all that remained necessary was to order the visiting-cards in the bowl. The Comtesse de Balazan's card was found again; unfortunately that of Mr. Jacob Mahlstein, *Officier de la Légion d'Honneur*, was dirty, but there was Madame Chavel's, and now Pauline Chavel was going to marry M. de Castelac its value increased.

III

"But your dress is delicious, *ma chère amie*," cried Madame Sarlat-Cohen. "Anybody can see that you go to Paquin!"

"Oh, Juliette, how can you be so ridiculous! Quite a simple black silk!"

"Not at all," replied Madame Sarlat-Cohen, "nothing is so elegant as black silk and *point de Venise*."

"*Charmant, charmant*," said the cracked voice of Mademoiselle Ravier. This was Monsieur Duvernoy's elderly aunt, to whom he allowed five thousand francs a year to live with the two Lacour girls. She

sat, with a perpetual smile on her thin old lips, in her faded clothes which had a knack of exhibiting a belt ten years after the damnation of belts and of turning into "one piece" garments whenever waists once more became the rage. She was short-sighted. She smiled. She agreed. Anybody could see that her soul was in pawn. By her side sat the elder Lacour girl, perhaps thirty, perhaps forty-five; who knows? After thirty, if marriage has not come, it is all the same, for French spinsters have no right to live: they are merely tolerated by a humane law.

"*Charmant, charmant,*" the Lacour phantom repeated. She, too, wore what Jacques Sorel spitefully called "pseudo-clothes."

Madame Duvernoy beamed. Certainly her straight back and good round figure were set off by her striped black silk dress and lace *guimpe*. She looked at her little plump hands and smiled deprecatingly while she returned Madame Sarlat-Cohen's compliments. The pious lady was brilliantly dressed in bright blue, the most fatal colour she could have selected, given her swarthy skin; her brown hands, the fingers of which, very like toes, passed bedizened through the air, leaving behind them the comet-like trail of her diamonds. The discussion on clothes was circumscribed, for Mademoiselle Ravier and Mademoiselle Lacour were merely guests of the Barmecide.

"All the same," Madame Duvernoy sighed, "*la toilette* is very expensive."

"Not at all," replied Madame Sarlat-Cohen; "you must be clever, that's all. You must buy remnants: believe me, remnants are better than new pieces; it is the stuffs people do not buy which make the *femme élégante*."

Madame Duvernoy smiled, but Madame Sarlat-Cohen was not aware that she had almost, if not quite, brought off an epigram.

"And," she continued, "you must take trouble, have energy. For instance, I bought a petticoat at the Printemps the other day, and when I got home it did not fit, it was too small. So I took it back and made them exchange it for six pairs of stockings; of course they didn't want to, but oh, I talked to the girl. . . ."

"I expect you did, Juliette."

"I did. It doesn't do to let people be rude to you, I talked to her like a dog."

Madame Duvernoy smiled at the vision of her Semitic friend asserting her dignity; Mademoiselle Ravier smiled in unison, and the poor Lacour ghost, finding that she had been left behind, precipitately grinned.

"You are right, Juliette," said Madame Duvernoy; "life is difficult nowadays; one must look after oneself, everything is so dear. And, after all, money is the most important thing in the world."

"Money," muttered Madame Sarlat-Cohen, "yes . . . all the same, there's love."

"Juliette, Juliette! I shall tell Monsieur Mézin."

"What's Monsieur Mézin got to do with it?" the little dark woman asked rather fiercely. "Always your fusses, Marthe. Why, I can't look at a man . . . one was enough, I can tell you. Oh, *le mariage moderne*, a nice institution!"

"I suppose you advocate free love?" suggested her friend.

"Do not be ridiculous. . . . I——"

There was a moment of confusion, for Madame and

Mademoiselle de Morenda were announced; they were greeted with little cries of welcome, except by the poor relations, who timidly offered to resign their chairs; but at once Letitia took the meeting in hand, put her mother on a distant couch, selected for herself a stool, and, turning her back on the inert spinsters, proceeded to attack Madame Sarlat-Cohen.

"You were speaking of modern marriage?" she suggested.

"*Oui*," cried Madame Sarlat-Cohen; "Madame Duvernoy doesn't believe in love. It's blasphemy, that's what it is."

"Well," said Letitia bluntly, "I should prefer money to love; one can always get the second in France when one has the first."

Madame Sarlat-Cohen threw up her hands with an air of dismay. "Marthe," she gasped, "listen. That's how young women talk, women who are going to be wives."

"Oh, I'm not going to be a wife," said Letitia smoothly. "I might be in Turkey where they buy us, but here it's the other way about. And don't talk of love: as I cannot afford a husband I shall not be able to afford a lover, for a husband is the preliminary stage."

"Letitia!" said Madame Duvernoy severely, "if you talk like that, you will certainly not get a husband."

"You may be right. Husbands are things you buy, borrow or steal. I can't buy; borrow . . . well, that comes after the third alternative, stealing. As the sweet young thing must buy her man, and I have no capital, I have but one chance: I must steal him from her, surprise him, shock him; I must be wild,

extraordinaire, and then perhaps some lark, dazzled by the mirror, will fall to my gun."

The four older women looked at one another with dismay. Madame Duvernoy was deeply shocked, Madame Sarlat-Cohen genuinely indignant, for she thought herself sentimental; the two spinsters were stirred but frightened by this violent young thing. As for Madame de Morenda, on her distant couch, she did not move a muscle: she was waiting for Letitia to have done.

"Letitia," said Madame Duvernoy, "I pray you, do not talk like that. It makes a bad effect."

"Pooh, I shall marry an Englishman," said Letitia; "they like me, those I have met, even though I do not tolerate *le flirt*."

"Ah, *le flirt*," interposed Madame Sarlat-Cohen, "there is another of your modern institutions. In my time one did not flirt, and less vitriol was thrown about."

"Well," said Madame Duvernoy amiably, "there's no connection between *le flirt* and *le vitriol*."

"There is a similarity," Letitia answered. "One comes from the laxity of morals, the other from the laxity of the law."

"Laxity!" cried Madame Sarlat-Cohen, "I should think so! Why, a woman can throw a barrel of vitriol. . . ."

"A *litre* will do, *chère Madame*. . . ."

"Well, a *litre*, and she gets off! The jury weep!"

"I suppose most jurymen have been in love," suggested Madame Duvernoy.

The wrangle went on triangularly. Madame Sarlat-Cohen, in virtue of the exquisite irony of things,

attacking women for their love madness, this madness of which she prated, Letitia defending them for giving way to feelings she despised. Madame Duvernoy at last stopped the quarrel and compelled Letitia to hand round the tea; the elderly Lacour girl rose too, for after all she was unmarried and had her duties to attend to. In the midst of the "*five o'clock*" Mézin entered, in his habitual frock-coat, his black whiskers and bald pate almost artificial in their intensity; a few minutes later Jacques Sorel, yellow-haired and equivocal, bent over Madame Duvernoy's hand. There was clatter, some pushing as Letitia and the Lacour girl fell over each other in the fulfilment of their obligations. Madame de Morenda sat sadly on the distant couch with a cup of tea in her hand; nobody offered her milk or sugar: even the Lacour girl felt that she was not worth a macaroon.

"Well, Monsieur Mézin," said Madame Sarlat-Cohen in her most sprightly manner, "I hope you remember my party wall."

"Madame, I dream of your party wall and regret only that it separates us."

"*Chut! Monsieur Mézin,*" cried Madame Duvernoy, "that is almost a declaration."

"Of love," said Sorel mischievously, "the thing that is nearest to war."

Letitia's eyes glittered with fighting lust.

"No," she said, "the thing that is nearest to war is peace."

Mézin and the two women began to laugh.

"*Voyons*, young people," he said ponderously, "do you know what you mean?"

"Not a bit," said Sorel, "but you know that La Fontaine says that madmen sell wisdom, that the

Arabs believe they hive it, while the Scripture says something about babes and sucklings."

"Ah, Monsieur Sorel," simpered Madame Sarlat-Cohen, "you have too much wit. You dazzle us, you make us ashamed of ourselves because we are not clever."

"Pardon me, then." The young man pushed back his yellow hair. "Wit, *chère Madame*, is no creature of man's, it is a habit."

"You should get rid of it," grumbled Mézin.

"Sell me your cure," replied Sorel.

Letitia began to laugh, while Mézin glared at the young man with stupid ferocity: he had not understood. Fearing that he might, Madame Duvernoy threw her weight into the conversation, even tried to drag in Mademoiselle Ravier. But the old aunt refused to talk: she called the Lacour girl and stated that she had had enough tea, and would now have some chocolate, as well as another *tartine Renaissance*. The spinster was busy too, drinking more and more tea as she served other people and surreptitiously returning to sandwiches after having helped herself to cake. Then Madame and Mademoiselle Chavel were announced. The mother sailed in, swelling like a caravel under full sail; the lovely Pauline followed her, diffident and triumphant, as if she wore already the family jewels of the Comte de Castelac. Madame Chavel refused to eat or drink.

"We are so busy," she said hurriedly, "so much to do, so many visits. You see, everybody pursues us; I have to see our friends and *la marquise*, the mother of Monsieur de Castelac; she adores Pauline. *N'est-ce pas, Pauline?*"

Pauline did not raise her beautiful eyes. Every-

body looked at her, Madame Duvernoy with approval, Madame Sarlat-Cohen with anticipation, for she would be a calling centre; the two elderly spinsters feared to look, as if they might be blinded. Alone Letitia threatened to be aggressive, while Sorel assumed a sardonic expression.

"*Oui, maman*," she said at length, "one owes something to one's family."

Madame Chavel beamed.

"*La famille*," she said ponderously, "is sacred. Every Tuesday we dine at my mother's, and every Thursday at my father-in-law's. Of course, now we go at least once a week to Madame de Castelac; later on I shall expect Pauline and her husband every Wednesday."

"That's a pity," said Sorel, "that leaves three days."

"Oh, there are other calls. Every week my mother comes to us the same evening as does my father-in-law, but that's quite *en famille*."

"That leaves two days," said Mézin, taking up Sorel's gentle sneer.

"But what are you complaining of?" cried Madame Sarlat-Cohen.

"You, too, Monsieur Mézin, you want to destroy the family," said Madame Duvernoy.

"In our world," said Madame Chavel stiffly, "one respects convention."

"You are an iconoclast," said the perfidious Sorel.

Mézin bowed his dull head under the storm. What had he said?

Soon the old people were exchanging once more their opinions on the sacredness of the family tie, while Letitia and Sorel tried to draw Pauline.

"What's it like being a Comtesse?" asked Letitia.

"I don't know," said Pauline shyly.

"You anticipate, Mademoiselle," said Sorel.

Pauline blushed.

"You never can tell," said Sorel, increasing her confusion. Letitia looked at him angrily.

"Monsieur Sorel," she said finally, "you respect nothing."

"I do, I do," he protested, "I respect ugliness, vice, deformity, dishonesty, cowardice, greed."

"Well, that's a nice collection!"

"As you like. It means, at any rate, that I am a good citizen who honours the social system in which he lives."

Letitia looked at him for a second, shrugged her shoulders. "Ah, you cynics," she said at last, "how sentimental you are. You only hate because you love."

"Possibly. If that is so, then your friend Henri Duvernoy is a cynic, for he thinks he loves right enough."

"What do you mean?" Letitia asked breathlessly.

"How many times did he dance with *la petite Bernay*," the young man whispered.

Letitia tightened her lips. Pauline's eyes opened wider and became rather rapt; she too had noticed and wondered, as she danced with the old beau, Monsieur de Castelac, her husband-elect.

"Letitia," said Madame Duvernoy sharply, "you are not helping anybody."

Madame Duvernoy broke in—scattered the group. She had heard that whisper, that fatal whisper—knew that now the world was going to talk. Still, with splendid courage, she smiled upon Madame Chavel,

who left busily explaining that she still had four calls to pay. For another half-hour she painfully kept the conversation alive; she wondered horribly whether Madame Sarlat-Cohen had heard; if she had, all was over, but she showed no sign. Little by little the drawing-room cleared; Mézin left, soon followed by Madame Sarlat-Cohen, still innocent and voluble. As Letitia sulked Jacques Sorel thought well to carry his paradoxes to another place before the end of calling hours. The half-hour dragged into the hour, for Mademoiselle Ravier and the Lacour girl stayed. They were poor and knew not when to go; besides, the sandwiches were not finished.

At last Madame Duvernoy was alone. She felt one moment broken and then enraged. But she never thought of yielding, even when Henri arrived and kissed her cheek; she executed a preconceived plan, handing him a small parcel.

"It's . . . *L'Armée Contre la Nation* . . . by Urbain Gohier," she said.

"Oh, *maman!*"

"Yes, but, Henri, don't tell your father I gave it you . . . you know how he hates the *Dreyfusards*."

Henri kissed her again, but he could not know what it meant to her, this fostering in him of a political doctrine his father had taught her to hate. He could not know how abjectly indifferent she felt to everything, his faith in men, politics, God—how utterly she would brush aside her opinions and her husband's teaching—if he only would stay hers.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

BATAILLE

I

HENRI read *L'Armée Contre la Nation* with a fine joy. He caught himself, as he walked the streets, repeating phrases, culled perhaps from the book, perhaps from some friendly newspaper, such as: "Braid grows on the sleeves of our generals as does moss on rotten logs." But he did not mentally thank his mother, largely because he did not associate her with politics. He was too well accustomed to find Frenchwomen interested solely in their household, their children, their clothes, perchance their lover (though these in his world were few), interested too in the pornographic pseudo-antique which represents for the Boulevard the latest drama. He had analysed vaguely their taste for locating the Acropolis on Montmartre hill, among the little hells which call themselves *cabarets*; he had felt the futility of them, the oversexed stupidity which made them pick out of Mirbeau, Paul Adam, Muhlfeld, Mendès, Pierre Louys, the more stimulating portions, while they ignobly left behind the fine social thesis of the one, the wild or languid grace of the others; he knew too, though he was too impressed to criticise, that their raves for Lalique or Nau jewellery, their sessions at Claude Monet's shows in the Durand-Ruel Gallery,

their Japanese art, their Chinese art, their Etruscan art, their mauve potteries (colour of an immature swan), their Liberty stuffs, their English furniture and their Russian tea (with lemon)—he knew that all this was part and parcel of Paris, Paris a sham and Paris a shell, Paris that postures and grins ape-actorlike before its cheap mirror, Paris the world's Hôtel Métropole, where all gold is brass, where marble is wood and wood is papier mâché . . . if Henri could have torn away the veil, how gladly would he have expressed his secret feeling and called Paris a twopenny Babylon!

It was Henri's weakness that he felt rather than understood things; his was never the clear vision which enables the brain dispassionately to weigh and judge things and men. No lover of the country, for the Parisian born is a citizen ever, he was not in tune with his times; the current of life seemed too fast and too turbulent, too choked above all with the pretence of wealthy society, Adrien Pervenche's clothes, Jacques Sorel's epigrams, and *chic* things, *chic* women, *chic* restaurants, *chic* preachers at Saint Philippe du Roule. All he knew was that in this rotting society which rested like a phosphorescent screen over the solidities of the *bourgeoisie*, there was only one thing that stood out massive and simple, and that was Suzanne, a reality among unrealities.

He was happy in his love, for love it truly was and he dared believe it. Nearly every day brought him a letter addressed to the *étude*, for he had made suitable arrangements with the *concierge*, and it was an unfailing joy for him to find each letter more tender than its forerunner as a flower unfolding, blossom out even into restrained but perceptible passion. Nothing,

in these days, could daunt the lover's courage, not the short-sighted but inquisitive looks of old Loupil, when he more than once caught him covertly reading the letter of the day, nor the more open remarks of the cheap Don Juans, Sarmin and Morel. He was so wonderfully above them because distinguished, because the owner of such a love.

At home the situation had hardly changed, for Madame Duvernoy, as the days passed and nothing showed that Henri's name was coupled with that of Suzanne, began to discount the danger, to doubt its existence even, as a threatened man who anxiously awaits the first symptoms of some fell disease feels hope growing in his breast when they do not appear. The gift of the book was as much an attempt at reconquest as an evidence of affection; it showed that Madame Duvernoy had minutely thought out which of all things would most please her son. She had pitched upon a book which pandered to his views and given it him, as she would have given him her heart if, like Richepin's hero, he had wanted it. One thing only she could not give, the thing for which Henri mutely asked whenever he looked her in the eyes. Prayer and denial were ever in their faces; a subtle tug-of-war pervaded their most innocent words and deeds. At times Madame Duvernoy would raise her head covertly to look at Henri, because she had felt round her the heavy atmosphere of his plea; nothing was said, but their two desires, the dynamic and the static, seemed grimly to face one another, to press panting surface to surface like interlocked wrestlers who strain and desperately resist without a groan. There were battles too, cruel little battles like fights in the dark, when Henri had on his lips the

words he would utter, his mother the curt refusal that threatened to burst its bonds before he could speak, when a disagreement as to the choice of a play, the place where they would walk, became pregnant with significance. Commands became tyrannies and refusals rebellions; the mother could not assert her rights to obedience without feeling that her son read them as cruel decrees, while he could not be unruly without stabbing her to the soul, for it meant that he loved her no more.

Monsieur Duvernoy seemed to buzz in the midst of this tenseness like an irrelevant fly, to exaggerate by his petulance and his irritability his unimportance in the scheme; he played no part in the struggle, but walked on as a transitory phantom busied with trifles, business, money, a railway case, politics, the shuffling on the vague board of Parliament of little cardboard figures. He was the foil and yet, as he passed through their lives unscathed and untouched by the conflict, he was the thing that often parted them and then cast them together to tumble and rage silently like tiny boys who roll in the gutter, speechless with fury and dealing one another with their puny strength ridiculous little blows.

All through, the letters of Suzanne were cast softly upon Henri's heated and uneasy soul as, after Actium, the legend says, baskets of rose petals were emptied on the sweating downcast brows of the galley slaves. She was for him, as for them, relief from the blue sea, bluer sky, brown sand, the cruel golden boats.

II

But passion, which gladly feeds awhile on absence, soon becomes exasperated if it must long so live; the loved being slowly clothes itself, as seen from the distance through the lovely cloudland of memory, with the colours of the rainbow; it becomes a spirit, a principle of sweetness endowed with all virtues and beauties, a power whose remoteness is healing, whose faint and roseate picture smooths when evoked the wrinkles from the chafed soul. For awhile it sits aloof and beneficent upon its column of mist; it haunts day-dreams and makes of them gorgeous fantasies where abstract hands cling in vows and humid eyes look hungrily, then contentedly, at the sensuous pageant of its presence; it is love itself, love sublimated, brought by a spiritual process to the highest pitch of mental intensity. Then, and this is not the waning but the materialising which drags the dream to earth, extinguishes its star and detaches its wings, clothes it in a body and gives it breath, unease begins to prey upon the lover, to fill him with fears without a name, unreasoned doubt; then there are aches and pains in the very essence of the bond. The longing, which at first was gentle and melancholy as the sweet sorrowing for a hope long dead, becomes precise and exacting; it thrusts its acid flavour into the air the lover breathes, courses through and sours his blood. It becomes more definite, it haunts and then holds, obsesses and then pervades him, cleaving to him until he knows that nothing can free him from the hellish shirt except sight of the thing loved. He

is then ready for extravagance, for the dream has become a reality, is held up far above him but visible in bold colours, no longer in subtle shades; and if he may not grasp it he is ready to snatch, to tear at it and destroy it, to destroy himself and the rules that govern his life.

Henri passed through all these stages. He knew the first days of memory and anticipation when he perpetually evoked Suzanne, her pale skin, her dark-shaded eyes, the faint down on her short upper lip, and her long arms with the slim hands. Without effort he evoked her as he sat at his work, as he walked the streets. She was very much then *la très chère*, *la très belle*, who filled his heart with radiance, but the repetition of the pleasure seemed to leave him unsatisfied, worse indeed: his passion felt burnt and withered as are lips that have fed too long on kisses. He became less able to endure the parting; Suzanne's letters, carrying some faint but reminiscent scent, exasperated rather than allayed his unrest. He could have cried out when his mother casually mentioned one day that the Bernays had called. He, poor fool, was meanwhile sitting at Fouquet's Bar, whither he had followed a woman because she had something of Suzanne's lazy walk and her length of neck. The woman had turned to look at him curiously and he had turned away, bitterly disappointed and bitterly conscious too that all women would now disappoint him. And Suzanne had passed half-an-hour in his mother's drawing-room, half-an-hour during which he could have looked at her, heard her voice, perhaps touched her hand as he handed her a cup of tea. The shock was such that his weak will flickered into action: he must see her, if not that

day, then the next. He thought of calling, but he knew that he was too cowardly to risk a denial, to play for the great stake and be told the ladies were not at home; above all, though he was too bombastic to own it to himself, he dared not risk detection and fight his mother on a fact: to fight her on an abstract point was hard enough.

He did not, however, vacillate in his intention, which was to see Suzanne, for to see her would be a great deal. He easily obtained from old Loupil leave for the day; the old man looked at him shrewdly with his prominent eyes and nodded assent. Henri took up his straw hat and hurried out of the *étude*, hatefully impelled by Morel's mumbled sneer, "*Compliments à Mademoiselle.*" At eleven o'clock he stood opposite the house in the Rue de Miromesnil. He was favoured by fortune, for here was a shop to be let, so that he could stand in the entrance well sheltered to the right and left and practically sure of being left undisturbed. His eyes roved between the porch and the windows of the flat; nothing appeared at these, and all he could see were the maroon taffeta curtains softly moving in the warm June air behind the heavy lace blinds. He waited, and every time a servant or a tradesman came out of the porch a wave of excitement passed over him. The life of the street passed him by and still he waited patiently, suspiciously watched at times by a *sergent de ville*. The old women pushed their barrows of vegetables by; one, whose stock was all lovely red cherries, stopped in front of him.

"*Des cerises, Monsieur, des belles cerises, quatre sous la livre.*"

"*Non, merci.*"

"Voyons, Monsieur, quatre sous de cerises pour Mademoiselle."

Henri blushed, the woman began to laugh. He longed to buy the beautiful cherries, for it was hot and anxiety made his throat feel dry, but he thought it unseemly to be found by Suzanne, if such bliss was to be his, grossly eating fruit under her windows.

"Elles sont belles, Monsieur," the woman persisted. Henri did not reply. She turned to a servant and filled a bagful, whispering meanwhile. The servant, a young woman, laughed, eyeing Henri with an air of invitation. Their tittering irritated him; he felt they were classing him, discovering and soiling his dream. At last the cherry-vendor began to push her barrow away. The servant-girl looked at Henri mischievously and, suddenly, threw at him a couple of cherries.

Two hours passed, then another. He did not think of his lunch, nor of the explanation he would have to give at home; the stream of life briskly eddied in the Rue de Miromesnil: carriages, motor-cars passed by, veiling, much to his annoyance, his view of the porch. A red-and-yellow striped van belonging to the Bon Marché obstructed it horribly for ten minutes; still, as it was the best place, he had to stay. At two o'clock he was rewarded. Suddenly two figures came out of the porch and a warm feeling of gladness seemed to ooze from his pores. He was conscious of Madame Bernay's presence, but his physical eyes saw only Suzanne, Suzanne slim and elegant in her striped linen coat and skirt, her light straw hat trimmed with black ribbon bows. They hesitated a second, then turned to the right, passed him on the other side of the street without seeing him. He watched them

out of sight, impelled to follow but fearing to obey the impulse. His eyes took in the delicious swaying movement of her body, the neat sharpness of her walk. Then they vanished and the world was empty once more. He idly wondered whether he had not better go and have lunch, but sentimental hunger dominated the physical. He felt he must see her again. He would wait.

He waited while the afternoon waned and a deeper warmth filled the summer air. His thoughts, entirely concentrated into a single channel, revolved round Suzanne, whom he pictured in some shop, buying those soft stuffs of which she made stems for the flower of her face; he imagined her as she walked erect and smiling, followed by the admiring eyes of men, and later, perhaps at the Thé de Ceylan, or at the cheaper Kardomah or the Medova, or at Neal's in the Rue de Rivoli. He rather liked to think of her at Neal's, though the chances were a thousand to one against her being there, for the contrast between her and the boyish femininity of the tweed-clad English girls who frequented Neal's was agreeable; it was all to her advantage: she was so soft and gentle, while they had large hands, wore low-heeled thick boots, and did not powder their noses. Henri reflected that he did not like those hermaphrodite sporting animals who preferred soap (Pears' soap, the soap of England as France understands it) to *verveine* and *iris d'Houbigant*.

He was tired, for now he had stood six hours almost; it was five, and already many young men with violent ties had passed him by, officials from the *Ministère de l'Interieur* no doubt, and many day-boys from the Lycée Condorcet on their way to their

proud homes near the Champs Elysées. He was so tired that the cramp which had several times attacked his legs had now vanished, leaving them stiff as if the muscles had hardened. Still he did not go, for he felt assured that soon he would be rewarded, see her return laden with parcels, as graceful, as sprite-like as his dream. And as he thought she appeared, as in his evocation, carrying two small parcels done up in brown paper and boldly marked with the "Lion" trade-mark of the Louvre. She was still as neat and as erect, swaying a little as she walked like some beautiful trim frigate on a softly heaving sea. He recognised from afar her striped coat and her light hat, her white-gloved hands, her small arched boots and her flower-like pert ingenuous face. She came nearer and Henri smiled as he looked at her, his glance ignoring the quiet and faded figure of her mother. They drew nearer, they were about to enter the porch, when Suzanne raised her eyes, looked towards him. At once he saw a hot wave sweep over her face, drowning forehead, neck and ears in crimson; he saw her eyes glow and her lips part, half laughing, half tremulous, as if her emotion brought her as near to tears as to smiles. She did not, however, stop, but followed her mother through the porch.

At once the joy which had passed, fleet as a meteor, through every cell of Henri's body vanished in the immense reaction of his weariness; his legs ached again and he suddenly shivered as he became aware that the sun was near its setting: he could see its dying rays gild the roofs of the houses opposite. The transition had been sharp, but, as if animated by some vague hope, he remained standing in the street, looking

up stupidly towards the maroon taffeta curtains. He wondered whether she would appear at a window, and passionately willed that she should. A curtain moved, stirring his despond, but it was only the wind. Then as his eyes roved inquisitive over the four windows, her face appeared at the last, exquisitely thrown into relief by the dark background; it seemed to hover like a mysterious lovely ghost. For a while those two looked at each other with serious faces in which were sorrow and longing unbearable in their intensity.

Henri recovered first; he felt he wanted to call to her, to touch her. Before he could decide upon a course of action he was across the street, under the porch. As he climbed the stairs his heart pounded against his ribs and there revolved in his brain a vague plan of ringing the bell, entering the flat upon some pretext he could not think of, bearing her away. But he stopped on the second landing in front of the polished door and its heavy bronze handles and found he dared not act, did not know what to do; a blind instinct told him, however, that he must face the risk of being seen, of being ignobly caught by Bernay himself, and hope that Suzanne would understand that he was at her door desperately waiting.

Five minutes elapsed, five long minutes. Henri could feel his hands, his shoulders and knees quivering with excitement. At last he heard footsteps in the flat, the closing of a door, the footsteps growing nearer. Slowly the door opened and he saw framed in it the lovely dark head, the long-lashed eyes, the red mouth that quivered as it smiled. He looked at the glowing eyes in which there was fear, dimly

realising what this adventure meant for Suzanne, what she must be suffering as she felt behind her the pressure of a household's hostile curiosity; he knew the heroism a French girl must display if she so defies the laws of her sex, the risks she ran if detected, evil talk, threats and the cruel torture of her mother's reproaches. She was wholly giving, for she was of her nation, of a nation that gives nothing until it gives all and gives that all when it yields a part.

They looked at one another, still serious and stirred. Then Henri quickly took a step forward. He put his trembling hands on Suzanne's slim shoulders and knew the ultimate joy of feeling her respond, draw closer to him without coercion, without being wooed. He held her in his arms, soft, all of her yielding to him, and as he kissed her lips, pressed abandoned and desperate his mouth against hers, he did not think, or hear or feel aught but her in his arms, her his already and for ever his.

III

Madame Sarlat-Cohen always gave her select little tea-parties at the Elysée Palace Hotel, for her principle was to have her money's worth; thus she avoided the recent Ritz and the newer Rumpelmayer, for tea at the former cost two francs fifty, while at Rumpelmayer's you never could tell: an extra cake cost its weight in silver, while an unexpected guest with an appetite might have compromised the stability of her banking account. Juliette Sarlat-Cohen was careful and did not "tie up her dog with sausages"; she

liked to give a minimum sum for a maximum result, and her somewhat florid Oriental tastes made her prefer to the austerities of the Place Vendôme the spaces and heights of the Elysée Palace Hotel. She liked it; she haunted it, threaded its maze of reading-rooms, smoking-rooms and boudoirs with the queer sense of pleasure she might have felt in the Odessa ghetto, for its opulence awoke response in the daughter of a race accustomed to skies so blue as to be vulgar, to crude-coloured stuffs, to gildings and perfumes. For her the Elysée Palace Hotel was a beautiful thing, its tortured white frontage where pillars, wrought-iron balconies and stone garlands of flowers war for predominance, the quintessence of all arts. In this she was partly right, for the building is certainly catholic: the Renaissance and the *châteaux* of the Loire have given it much, but Rome has not been forgotten, while the flamboyant style flamboies in it and American taste rears it high aloft. The inside of the hotel, however, was her true paradise. She liked the feel under her feet of its over-heavy carpets, the folds of its official curtains, the far horizon of its vaulted ceilings; she liked the proper waiters, the heavy silver, the engraved glassware, the mats on which there was too much lace, the pots in which were too many palms; she liked its profuseness, its assertive band, and found that her self-esteem increased when she looked through the windows at the humble folk on the footwalk.

Madame Sarlat-Cohen's parties somehow suggested the place in which she held them; they were not so much vulgar as Parisian, which is slightly different: while vulgarity strives after pomp, Paris strives after effect, and Madame Sarlat-Cohen was attuned to her

city. This day the party had been beautifully calculated. Round the table she had booked in the middle of the largest window of the largest room on the Champs Elysées (the largest of the four streets on which the hotel looks) was a select company fit to be seen by any of her acquaintances. They were Madame Duvernoy and Henri, for they were useful though not smart; Madame Chavel and Pauline, because they were the latest thing; Madame de Tras Los Rios, because she was Mexican and a recent catch; and Adrien Pervenche, because in his heavenly mercy he had consented to come. Madame Sarlat-Cohen smiled benevolently upon the guests who were going to cost her fifteen francs fifty (no more, she dared tip the waiter one franc fifty), and reflected that this would liquidate at least two dinners and a seat in Madame Chavel's box at the Opéra. Adrien Pervenche raised in his long manicured hand the cup of China tea and, gently inhaling its aroma, made an announcement in the sudden hush—

"I am going to be a dressmaker."

There was a chorus of little screams, delighted and scandalised.

"*Oh, Monsieur Pervenche, la bonne idée,*" said Madame Chavel.

"You'll give me special terms, I hope," added Madame Sarlat-Cohen.

"You are a practical young man, Monsieur Pervenche," said Madame Duvernoy, smiling. "You will make a fortune, I am sure."

"Oh," said Pervenche, very languid, "it is not fortune I want. It is an interest, something in which to express my soul."

"Ah, how true that is," sighed Madame de Tras

Los Rios, "in these days of vulgarity life is hard for the artist."

Pervenche looked approvingly at the Mexican's black eyes and splendidly stayed bust, but did not address her directly.

"Clothes," he said thoughtfully, as he threw himself back in his chair and joined his rosy finger-tips, "are the expression of woman. A woman without her clothes is not a woman . . . she is an animal, a beautiful animal, but no more. Nudity is equalitarian, democratic and therefore vulgar, while clothes are individual, distinctive, and therefore aristocratic."

"Ah, how right you are," said Madame Sarlat-Cohen, "that's what I always think when I buy a hat."

"So I see, *chère Madame*," replied Pervenche, whose fine eyes cruelly roved over her red feathers, "and it is therefore to clothes I will devote myself. I will be a vestal and my temple is chosen."

"Who are you going to?" cried the lovely Pauline, speaking for the first time. The beautiful dark eyes were shining; the discussion was causing her heart to palpitate as it never had for the Comte de Castelac.

"Paquin? Doucet? Callot?" suggested Madame Sarlat-Cohen eagerly.

"Worth?" contributed Madame de Tras Los Rios.

"Redfern?" said Henri sardonically. Pervenche looked at him with undisguised contempt, and replied—

"No, Monsieur Duvernoy; I wish to make clothes, not caparisons for horses."

Laughter rippled round Petronius. The party would have liked to applaud.

"My temple," said Pervenche, "will be my own. I will call myself 'Robsay-Mantho.'"

"Ah, très anglais!"

"Oh, how witty!"

"That will be very *chic*."

"I suppose you will be very dear?" Madame Sarlat-Cohen angled.

"Very dear. The basis of success in dressmaking, *chère Madame*, is never to accept an order."

"That hardly sounds like business," said Madame Duvernoy.

"Appearances deceive you, Madame. It is business. So long as you run after orders you will find that they run away; but give it out that you are engaged for three years ahead and duchesses will ask you to dinner, rich women will buy at any price options on other women's prior rights, and the prettiest of all will clasp you round the knees and weep for mercy."

"You are cynical," said Madame de Tras Los Rios.

"I?" said Pervenche, with an air of innocence. "You malign me. I am only speaking the truth. But that, of course, is very cynical."

"I suppose it is quite true," said Madame Sarlat-Cohen; "I should like a *robe d'intérieur* from Robsay-Mantho."

Henri looked on with unconcealed disgust. He thought them all hateful: Madame de Tras Los Rios all eyes and ogles, the lovely enthralled Pauline, her mother and even his own tolerant and friendly, Madame Sarlat-Cohen lying in wait to secure a promise if Pervenche gave her a chance to do so. It struck him as the discussion went on that all this was horribly futile and unreal, and, as his eyes roved

over the lounge where almost every table was occupied, he was overwhelmed by an immense longing for Suzanne and her spontaneous love. Round him every group more or less reproduced his own party. The foreign element was a strong minority, mostly Spanish-American; it screamed and waved its hands and glittered; it paraded its rings and its new clothes, full of good-humour, the tolerant good-humour of conquerors. They knew, this mongrel crowd, whipped up from the coffee plantations of Brazil, these simians from Warsaw and Cracow whose fathers had felt the knout, these sleek Syrians and Greeks with lovely hands and eyes liquid and treacherous as those of leopards, they knew that they were well settled on the garbage heap of shady finance, ostentatious motor-cars, eighty-pound frocks and salacious plays—that they were the true masters of a fading Latin people, that they were the new Parisians if not Paris itself.

Henri watched them, full of distaste. He disliked them because they were opulent, because their pocket-books were bursting; he despised them because they so brutally were. Scattered among them were the French, and he disliked them equally. For the panorama of the great hall was very much that of Paris itself. There sat the Frenchwomen of the new smart set, women stiff in their secret armour of leather and steel, with set smiles on their faces and an air of fictitious excitement, an almost drunken excitement, so steeped were they in their lust for these pleasures of decay. Beyond, on the broad sidewalk of the Champs Elysées, passed the Sunday procession of the French, stupefied *bourgeois* fathers whose youth had gone in futilities, who were now becoming

fat, their wives with hard faces and cruel avaricious mouths, their few children, puny as befits the inheritors of such a generation.

All this ugliness, understandable or incomprehensible, filled Henri with a growing desire to be quit of it all, to steal away with Suzanne to another place: Auteuil, where are little villas behind walled gardens, or the Rive Droite, where the Faubourg St. Germain still stands aloof from modern temptations: dinners at Armenonville, rides in Panhard cars and seats on boards of directors. He wanted to fly from this place where everything was something provided it were nothing, where clothes mattered and wealth, and titles, and *chic*, and wit, where love was funny or bestial, honour a commodity and hope limited by immediate desire. And now Pervenche was talking again.

"Yes," he said, "I was only saying so the other day to Vieilleroche, the Comte de Vieilleroche, you know. He was asking me whether he should place his coronet on the new paduasoy with which he is having the chairs at the manor re-seated. I said, 'No, Vieilleroche, you will not do this thing.'"

"You were quite right, Monsieur Pervenche," said Madame Chavel; "I am always saying to my son-in-law—well, my future son-in-law—that coronets are vulgar and that you can buy them from the Pope by the pound."

"By the pound sterling, *chère Madame*. You are always right, Madame, you have *le sens des choses aristocrates*. But my reason was not that. You see, vulgarity has become aristocratic since the Americans introduced *Sa Majesté le Dollar*. My reason was that an old friend of mine, le Capitaine Massarin——"

"A charming man," said Madame de Tras Los Rios.

"You know him?" asked Pervenche, genuinely surprised that anybody should be so smart as to know his friends. "Well, Massarin was calling the other day with my old schoolfellow the Duc de Gueret on the Baronne Galgenstein. You should see their coronets! They have them on the plate and on the plates, on the walls and over the porch; there isn't a trouser button in the house that hasn't its coronet, while I hear she is having the books re-bound so as to ennoble the binding."

"Including those of the Banque Galgenstein?" asked Henri.

"No," said Pervenche, with a smile, "she would like to, but then the binder would see the entries."

"Bad boy," said Madame Sarlat-Cohen waggishly.

"All financiers are the same," said Madame Chavel, "our world would not know them."

"Which, if you will forgive me, *chère Madame*, makes *Tout-Paris* anxious to go to their parties. But, to resume, after Massarin, who for all his smart friends is a democrat, had sat on one of her best chairs for half-an-hour, he left with *le petit* Gueret and, in the hall, dusted the seat of his trousers with his pocket-handkerchief. 'What the deuce are you up to?' said Gueret in his aristocratic way, you know. 'I?' replied Massarin, 'I'm rubbing off the coronet.'"

Pervenche's story was greeted with delighted shrieks. He complacently beamed on his admirers and then, after explaining how this had for ever settled the question of coronets on the Comte de Vieilleroche's paduasoy, told further stories where

figured over and above the *Almanach de Gotha*, Claretie and his latest wrangle with Le Bargy, Antoine and his new play and the lapidary *mot* with which he, Pervenche, had demolished the edifice of Rostand's literary reputation. Meanwhile, or rather during the intervals of Pervenche's pyrotechnic display, Madame de Tras Los Rios was discovering the touching mutuality of her and Madame Duvernoy's acquaintances. They discussed, as was then the fashion, the marriage of the Comte de Vieilleroche and of Mademoiselle Stein, the Comtesse de Balazan (whose horses Madame Duvernoy knew by sight), Jacob Mahlstein, *Officier de la Légion d'Honneur*, the Samaros, also the under-clothes of Her Serene Highness the Princess of Lutzelbucht. Last of all, and almost accidentally, the Bernays came on the tapis, for the Tras Los Rios tobacco estates were largely managed by the enterprising financier.

"What! You know the Bernays!" cried the Mexican; "charming people."

"Oh yes, charming, charming."

"Monsieur Bernay especially, *si sceptique, si Parisien*, and yet so gallant. Do you know what he said to me when I told him the other day that good Mexicans go to Paris when they die? Oh, you'll never guess."

"No, I can't guess," said Madame Duvernoy, who seemed uninterested.

"He said, 'Quite true, and when they have passed through the Paripurgatory they go to Mexico!'"

Madame Duvernoy smiled uneasily; she did not care for the turn the conversation was taking and stole a look at Henri, but he seemed perfectly cool. Still, it was not healthy and she tried to change the

topic, but she tried in vain, for Madame de Tras Los Rios was full of tropical zeal.

"And Madame Bernay!—so amiable, so pretty, always so elegant, though they do say that they spend more than they make. And their daughter, Suzanne. I think her lovely, don't you?"

"Yes, she's rather pretty," said Madame Duvernoy grudgingly.

"Pretty! She is beautiful, beautiful. Eyes like the wing of a crow and a voice like laughing water."

"You are poetic, *chère Madame*," sniffed Madame Duvernoy.

"*Que voulez-vous?* We are like that in our country; we are passionate as the Spaniards and wild as the Indians. But Suzanne makes me poetic, she is so beautiful. I am sure you at least agree with me, Monsieur Duvernoy? Ah, how silly, of course you must, else you would not call there. . . . I remember seeing you come out of their house the other day."

Madame Duvernoy for a moment was Roman.

"Henri," she said in a clear even voice, "I am sorry, but it's getting late and we have to meet some friends."

IV

"And now," said Madame Duvernoy, "perhaps you will explain."

Henri stood with downcast eyes and a pouting underlip before his father and mother, a prejudiced tribunal; he looked more like an angry child than like the young man of the world he had, with passable

success, impersonated at the Elysée Palace. He had walked home with his mother, without exchanging a word with her during the quarter of an hour which elapsed between their departure from the hotel and their arrival at the flat. Madame Duvernoy would gladly have stamped and screamed in the Champs Elysées, but bravely kept herself in hand. They had avoided each other's eyes, walked with clenched fists and set mouths, for they knew that the gloves were off, that the flimsy structure of pretence and ostrich-like complacency had fallen away from around them. Now Monsieur Duvernoy had been told, and had to face facts.

"I have nothing to explain," said Henri curtly.

"Nothing to explain?" said Monsieur Duvernoy. "*Hein!* Monsieur is dignified; Monsieur minds his own business. Understand, Henri, I forbid. . . ."

"Keep quiet, Jules," interrupted Madame Duvernoy. "Now, Henri, is this true?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Is that all you've got to say?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, as if the combatants were afraid to close.

"Oh, indeed!" sniffed Monsieur Duvernoy at last. "This is a nice business. You go behind our backs, you call on people whom you know we do not approve of, you compromise us. That, I suppose, is what you call filial duty."

Henri did not reply, and his mother became angrier.

"Can't you speak?" she snapped. "You owe us an explanation, and we intend to have it. You called on these people, presumably because you wanted to see Suzanne, not for the *beaux yeux* of Madame

Bernay, I take it. You know you did this in defiance of our . . . our wishes. It is not for you to call; it is for me. The fact that you went to their dance . . ."

"I wish he never had," snarled Monsieur Duvernoy.

"Well, he did. That demands a call under ordinary circumstances, but this is different. You have the . . . the insolence to go there, fraudulently, so to say, and sit in their drawing-room, take tea with them, be seen by everybody, proclaim you're courting Suzanne. It's awful, it's abominable. Whom did you meet there?"

"Nobody."

"Oh!" Madame Duvernoy seemed reassured. "Well, the harm's done, anyhow, by that woman, Madame de Tras Los Rios. What did Madame Bernay say? Was she surprised?"

"I didn't see her."

"Were they out?"

"No."

"Ah . . . that's funny." Madame Duvernoy's anger took another form. It was not pleasant to think that her son had called, but it was almost worse if he had been denied an interview; after all, he was her beloved, wonderful son. "Did they say they wouldn't see you?"

"Look here, Henri," said Monsieur Duvernoy, as the young man remained silent, "I demand that you tell us what did happen."

Henri looked at them both—his mother's flushed face and heaving bosom, his father's cynical eyes.

"I . . ." he faltered; then he decided to make a clean breast. "I waited until they came back; then I followed upstairs after they had gone in, and . . ."

"And what?"

The young man looked miserably about him as they fouled his dream."

". . . and . . . Suzanne came to the door, just for a minute."

The silence remained unbroken for an appreciable period.

"Well," said Monsieur Duvernoy at last, "nice goings on. My son dodges about stairs . . . sits on a seat on a landing . . . kissing and cuddling like a shopboy in the Bois de Boulogne. I wish it had been the Bois de Boulogne," he added viciously. "She's not difficult, *la petite Bernay*; you'd better take a cab by the hour next time."

"You've no right to say that," shouted Henri, as his face flamed up. "It's enough that I'm in love with her, and want to marry her."

"You shall not," said Madame Duvernoy. "Once and for all, Henri, take it from me we shall never consent. You are not going to force our hand by compromising yourself; you know our objections to the match, and there's nothing to add to what we have said."

"Nor to what I have said," replied Henri in a rather defiant tone.

"*Hein?* what? What does this mean?" Madame Duvernoy asked savagely.

Henri's eyes flashed, but at once his anger and strength died out.

Madame Duvernoy's heart was beating, for she scented rebellion; she decided to change her tactics.

"*Voyons, Henri,*" she said soothingly, "do be reasonable. One cannot have all one wants in this world; one must make allowances, one must

compromise; that's life, my poor child. Believe me, we do all for the best."

"You're breaking my heart," said Henri, with tears in his voice.

"Oh, don't be ridiculous," snarled his father. "Don't make us believe you're Werther come to life again."

"Really, Henri," said his mother, "you surprise me. You're not reasonable. We're not trying to force you to marry some one you dislike; we're only asking you to be patient, to wait, to be sensible; this is all . . . very young."

"Perhaps," said Henri angrily again, for "very young" had stung him.

"Look at your friends," Madame Duvernoy pursued, "they are sensible; they make the best of life. Look at *la petite Stein*; you don't suppose that she prefers M. de Vieilleroche to all the world? And Pauline Chavel? She's not in love with Castelac."

"No," sneered Henri; "she's marrying him for his title and he her for her beauty."

"Well," asked his father, "what do you want to marry *la petite Bernay* for? For her beauty, I suppose, as there's no money."

Henri looked nonplussed. Yes, it was true and rather awkward; he did want Suzanne for her beauty, but how could he explain what more she meant?—how she represented peace, love, home, grace, all things delicate and too subtle to be stated in words. He stood under the fire of his father's sneers, of his mother's threats and prayers, with numbness in his brain and a horrible weakness in his body.

"Now," said Madame Duvernoy at last, "promise us you will not do this again."

The young man remained silent. Monsieur Duvernoy opened his mouth to speak, but his wife signed him to be quiet.

"For my sake," she said gently.

Henri looked at her : her set face, her hard, dark eyes, then at his father's thin mouth and cruel gaze. He turned his eyes to every corner of the dining-room, seeking help in the Henri II sideboard, the heavy carpet, the butler with the whiskers whom he could see across the yard cleaning knives near the window. He felt alone among enemies, without ideas or strength. At last—

"I promise," he said in low tones.

Madame Duvernoy heaved a sigh, as if she had cast off a great weight.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

ARMISTICE

I

AND the hot, lovely days of June ebbed away. Paris flaunted everywhere the heavy pink-and-white pyramids of her chestnut flowers; the sunlight fell, not white as in England, but golden on the dry asphalt, while the little roofed barrows of the ice vendors with their arsenal of glasses and their lottery wheels passed in couples up and down the Champs Elysées, making for their favourite stations at the Arc de Triomphe and at the Place de la Concorde. Over the Tuileries and the gardens that were once the Exhibition lay a haze of dry heat. All through streamed the Paris procession: petty officials glad of their three-roomed flats, their childless wives and their two thousand francs a year; natty bank clerks, walking to their work at half-past eight, there to waste nine hours on work that should be done in six; little girls and beautiful statuesque *mannequins* bound for the big shops in the Rue de la Paix, most of them awake to possible adventure and keenly conscious of the value of admirers. Later, the solid elements, shopkeepers saving a ride in the Métro, stout merchants and Bourse touts who reluctantly walked their daily mile under doctor's orders; then their wives, on their way to the

Louvre, the Printemps, some to the elegant milliners' and dressmakers' shops that cluster round the Madeleine; and in the afternoon the lazy butterflies that flutter phosphorescent over the great town of petty minds and petty cares. The summer brought no relief to the stolid life of the city; it meant for the dour and thrifty masses a saving in fares, the furbishing up of old clothes, cheap vegetables instead of dear, and, for the young men, facile adventures by favour of the radiant sky.

Henri had not his share in the joy of life that might have been his. He unconsciously liked the season of effulgence: his soul was bruised, but he was young. Yet he could not enjoy to the full even his progress at tennis, his new pointed brown shoes and fancy socks, his straw hat which, as do all his countrymen, he inevitably bought too small. The cloud still hung over his family relations which had now changed, never more to be what they had been. He was miserably conscious that never more would he be his father's pride, as he had been when, after the distribution of prizes at the Trocadéro, he staggered down the steps of the platform carrying three prizes, and once, he remembered, four. As the young man stood at the corner of the Avenue de l'Alma, looking down its broad sweep towards the emptiness which hangs over the Seine, his mind went back to those great scenes, in 1895, when he was fourteen. He remembered the solemn prize-giving in the Trocadéro, and at once his thoughts reverted to earlier days still, when in its gardens he played marbles after school, then onwards to later years when he had walked there tongue-tied and enraptured by the side of a young girl who served at the pastry-

cook's on the Place. The Trocadéro had been such a centre, such a symbol, for there every year his progress had been recognised by his school, his name sounded for a while by the tramp of fame. He could see the auditorium filled by the two thousand boys and their proud, noisy parents, the platform with its two long tables covered with hundreds of books, all tied up in green ribbon; behind the three rows of masters in their robes, the *Provisieur* in the middle, the *Censeur* in his little pulpit monotonously chaunting the names of the prize-winners from the *Palmarès*. What a long dull speech he had had to hear that day from an *Inspecteur d'Académie*, and how funny it had been when he had elected to receive a prize from Gabachon, the drawing-master, because Gabachon had always disliked him! The old boy had been so surprised that the congratulations he carefully memorised (for others) before the ceremony had suddenly blended into an incoherent mumble. Poor old Gabachon! Henri smiled and felt a little ashamed of his subtle boyish act of revenge.

Those days were over. His father would no longer proudly turn over the pages of those ridiculous prizes and seriously advise him to read Racine out of school, or, worse still, the *Chroniqueurs Français* and *La Machinerie au Théâtre*. His father hardly spoke to him now, while his mother's desperate efforts to maintain friendly relations made him more uncomfortable than would have open warfare. He moved among them as a light vessel that has been blown out of her course and finds herself surrounded by ice-floes. At any moment a collision might occur, due to an involuntary movement, and he knew that he would be worsted. It was not that he was without hope, for

Suzanne wrote to him regularly at the *étude*, bidding him be of good cheer and vowing that she would never give him up. He took out of his breast pocket her last letter and unfolded it with the religious tremor which always filled him when he saw the fine sloping characters. He visualised with almost sickening emotion the long white hand which had written the words. The letter contained no news; it merely said that nothing would turn her so long as he wanted her, that her parents were, so far as she knew, ignorant of what was happening, but that they would not be likely to object. She begged him to do his utmost to gain his father's support, for she suspected that there was some business bond between him and her own father; thus perhaps he might isolate and weaken his mother. Then, without transition, the letter passed from the practical scheming of her intelligent brain to the lovelorn crying of her heart.

"You do not understand, Henri," she wrote, "for no one could, how much it means for me to have you in my life, to be able to hope to be loved as I love you; I have wanted it so dreadfully; I have been so afraid that I would be sacrificed, sold as are so many of my friends, given perhaps against my will to a man I detest . . . and you have come, giving me hope. If you were to die to-day, if I never saw you again, that would have made my life worth living."

Henri sighed, put the letter away, wondering a little why he felt so differently, why his mind was focused on those dark veiled eyes, those red lips he had kissed, those long hands he had held in his. He struggled to express to himself his reverence for the superior spirituality of the girl's love. No, he would not be content with a melancholy memory if he never

saw Suzanne again. He wanted her with more precision; he wanted her mentally, spiritually, physically; he wanted to be sure she was his and would for ever be his. Suddenly he felt ashamed at this leveling downwards of his passion: he was not worthy of her. Then he quickly swayed back to the conviction that young girls were not as young men; that his knowledge of women, as opposed to their ignorance of men, prevented him from looking at things as they did. After all, he had been a lover. He drew himself up and turned to enter the Café de l'Alma where he was to meet Javal.

II

The Café de l'Alma was not in those days the rather sumptuous and very English bar it has since become. While it nowadays is a lounge of the better Leicester Square type, it was then merely a café, rather large, rather comfortable, but a café still with a wooden floor on which fine yellow sand was sprinkled in curious patterns, a café with its big white metal globe for the waiters' napkins, daily papers in clamp holders and illustrated weeklies in black glazed covers. In fact, instead of being merely a place where you drank the stirrup cup, it was cheerful and noisy; there were groups of stout elderly men who wrangled and shouted as they played *manille* and *piquet*, even sometimes backgammon. Then they drank *absinthe orgeat*, *grenadine*, bocks of good French beer, "Maxéville" or "Comète"; not whisky and Schweppes, and stout and pale ale, and Martinis, Manhattans, mint juleps, those Anglo-American atrocities. Just

beside the door, under the awning, Javal sat before a *vermouth-citron*, lazily viewing the brown and gold base of the Hôtel d'Albe.

"Oh, here you are," said the little man, as Henri sat down by his side. "I thought you weren't coming. *Ça va bien?*"

"Yes, thanks, and you?"

Javal shook his head mournfully. No, he was far from well: dyspepsia, acidity, gout, rheumatism, incipient it is true, but there. Oh, he would have to be careful, take *Tisane des Shakers*.

"Oh, you're ridiculous with your diseases," said Henri. "If I was like you I'd put a bullet through my head. It's hypochondria; there's nothing the matter with you."

Javal was much insulted and painstakingly enumerated his symptoms. He wanted sympathy, but he could do without it; nothing at any rate could stop his valetudinarian chronicles except those of another invalid, for his was a great heart open to everybody's pains if not to their joys.

"Well, I have my troubles too," said Henri, who knew his peculiarities. "One might think when one hears you talk that you believe you've got a monopoly of suffering."

"Anything the matter with you?" said Javal greedily.

"Yes; well, nothing in the way you mean. My troubles are mental."

"I have seen signs of incipient insanity," said Javal quite seriously; "that marriage idea of yours, for instance. Of course that's all over."

"It's not. I've made up my mind."

Javal looked at him sorrowfully. "*Tu es idiot, mon*

pauvre vieux," he remarked at last; "of course she's very pretty, and all that, and——"

"How do you know? Do you know her?" Henri's rosy cheeks became red.

"Of course I do," said Javal with a short laugh; "who doesn't after the Bernays' ball? Why, any one but a fool could have seen it in the way you held her, looked into her eyes! Mind you, I understand you. *La petite Bernay*, well she's more than pretty, and a nice girl too."

"I'm glad you say that," Henri acknowledged; "then why do you laugh at me?"

Javal shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear fellow, how can you ask? Didn't we thrash all that out at the R.C.F. two months ago? You yourself said she only had fifty thousand francs. It can't be done, it simply can't."

The old wrangle began again, interminable and ever revolving round the value of money, the all-importance of gaining it, keeping it, preserving its integrity by limiting families. Still Henri gained ground, compelled his friend to own that "if one really loved one's wife it was better than if one did not."

"But suppose you do stick to it," said Javal at length, "what will your people say?"

Henri was embarrassed, called Adolphe and ordered another *Dubonnet*. "Oh," he said at length, "I don't know. They don't like it, of course; still, when they see I'm in earnest——"

"Oh, so they are against it?"

"Yes; well, I suppose they are against it. *Maman* thinks I ought to get at least two hundred thousand francs *dot*."

"Well, there's no chance of Bernay putting it up," said Javal, "unless you'll take it in shares . . . and you'd better not."

"Oh, I wouldn't mind."

"Idealist! Always impractical *ce cher Duvernoy*. But, my dear fellow, your ideals, all that sort of thing, you'd better take them to a *Miss Anglaise*, they're no use here. You can have your passions if you want to, but marriage is another thing."

"What do you mean?" Henri asked angrily.

"You let her marry somebody else, and then . . . well, you're no fool, are you?"

Henri looked at him with an air of amazement; he had a difficulty in speaking, so atrocious seemed the suggestion. Javal felt he had said too much.

"*Voyons*," he said, "you don't mean to say that you've never loved a woman who . . . well, say a widow."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"It means that these funny idealistic ideas of yours are all moonshine. Love and life are not the same thing; they are in watertight compartments and better thus, for, believe me, passion is a disturbing element when it comes to children's boots, weekly bills, and hats for the lady whom you worship."

Henri would have liked to change the conversation, for it soiled and bedraggled his dream; but it had a horrid fascination for him, and he had to go on.

"You don't understand," he replied. "It's not only passion with me; I adore her; I adore the clothes she wears, the ground she treads; I adore her shadow, I adore the thought of her. I haven't looked at another woman since I saw her."

"Well, well," mused Javal, "it's very extraordinary."

Do you actually mean to say that you've been faithful to her for two months?"

"I have," said Henri, with the pride of a martyr.

"But why, why? It's unaccountable. Have you any scruples?"

"No—that is, a kind of scruple. It isn't a nice idea."

"But surely you know you're exceptional? I'm not talking of after marriage—that's another matter—but before you're married—that's quite another matter."

Henri vainly struggled to explain that the idea Javal put forward disgusted him. He hardly knew how to put into words something so opposed to French traditions as faithfulness to an idea. For a time they argued "in the air," unable to understand one another, for Henri's idealism was muddled, while Javal, though more articulate, could not grasp the idea that his friend did not establish the national distinction between pre-nuptial and post-nuptial looseness. Javal was in no sense an immoralist; in fact, he was conventional according to his conventions. He saw no reason why a man should turn away from women, their pursuit and conquest, because he loved another; for him love was sex.

"You talk like a hero of D'Annunzio's," he said at length, "and they don't all marry."

"Perhaps I do," said Henri, nettled at this suggestion of high-falutin, "but it's no use talking. Marry her I will if I wait for ever."

"And she? Will she wait?"

"For ever," said Henri very softly.

Javal looked at him with an air of pity, then sighed as if he envied him a little and was sorry. Still he tried to reason with him.

"You know, you're not the only one. I, for instance—there's a girl I rather like . . ."

"Yes—Letitia," said Henri quickly.

"How do you know?" asked his friend, genuinely surprised.

"Oh, I suppose I'm sensitive just now. Besides, I feel she likes you."

"Do you think so?" said Javal rather breathlessly.

Henri began to laugh, while his friend nervously fingered his spoon.

"Oh, oh," he gasped at last, "and then you go preaching at me. You're just the same."

"One minute," said Javal coldly; "did I say I wanted to marry her?"

"No, but——"

"There is no but. Letitia de Morenda has not got a *sou*, and I don't expect her mother will leave her anything. I know."

"Oh, you've inquired? *Très amoureux!*"

"Nothing to do with love. Of course I inquired; it stands to reason I can't marry on three thousand francs a year."

"Oh yes, you can if you're in love."

"Well, why don't you do it?" asked Javal, suddenly turning on Henri.

Henri was staggered for an instant. He had not thought of that. "Oh," he said at length, "you're an orphan, you can do what you like. I've got my parents to consider."

"*Très amoureux,*" Javal sneered in his turn. "But you're right and so am I. Letitia won't find a husband."

"Well, what's the good of that to you?"

"Oh, you never know," said Javal, "you never

know. She's a fine girl," he added inconsequently. "Who knows, she may not be *difficile*."

"Javal," said Henri slowly, "you are an old friend, but you are really rather *dégoûtant*. You speak of women as if they were cattle, made for your pleasure. You think that nothing matters but money, position; you seem to think that love, the domestic hearth, children and happiness are decided by the fact that you can afford a first floor front flat instead of a fifth floor on the yard. What's more, you think there's so little to respect in women that you're quite willing to ruin a girl you'd be willing to marry if only she had some money. Frankly, Javal, *tu es dégoûtant*."

"*Tu es idiot*," said Javal.

Thereupon they left the café. There was no struggle as to who should stand the drinks; each paid for his own and separately tipped Adolphe.

III

On the fourteenth of July Henri heard that he had an ally. It was not a very strong or valuable ally, but a minority of two in a group of six is not particular as to recruits. The ally was Madame Bernay. He heard it from her own lips, and suddenly discovered that the faded woman was pretty and sweet as her own daughter. He did not, when he set out in the morning of the *Fête Nationale*, know what the day would bring him. Since daybreak the big guns of the Mont Valérien and of Vincennes had been slowly booming, thus imparting to Paris a curious military air and fostering the outbreak of semi-obsidional fever required by the celebration. While the Rue de

Marignan was having its coffee and rolls, long regiments had marched up the Champs Elysées in full kit, sweating and audibly cursing the Revolution and its heritage, while *escadrons* of dragoons and cuirassiers passed them at a trot and batteries rumbled by in a cloud of metallic noises. A martial air remained, made up of great bunches of flags over the porches of *mairies* and other public edifices, small shows of bunting at loyal windows and the swagger of such soldiery as was on duty in the town.

Henri had walked abroad feeling gay and rather light. The Fourteenth of July had always meant something to him from boyhood upwards, if no more than a holiday and hot weather. He could not remember a wet or cold Fourteenth, and instinctively knew that *l'Etre Suprême*, as the *Assemblée Constitutionnelle* chose to call Him, would never allow rain to spoil the memories of that hot day, a century ago, when the people had taken the Bastille. The memory made his generous young soul glow as muddled memories of Danton, Robespierre and fiery speeches, Desmoulins and gentlemanly Girondinism, rose to his mind. He honestly loved the Republic and closed his eyes to her failings; he would never face the fact that though '93 had ejected the Bourbon princes it had not provided against the Banque Galgenstein. He took "Marianne" very seriously, passed over the intrigues of electoral committees, the sale of orders, open or clandestine, the general prevalence of corruption in the civil service, the clerical scandals; he saw the Republic very much as Roty has drawn her on the coins, young and lithe, sowing the good seed with her lovely swaying arm over the broad French fields.

He passed the morning mainly in the Bois de Boulogne watching the troops go by and Paris preparing to make holiday. Over his head was the flat sky, which is so deep in July that it seems purple rather than blue, while not a cloud dares defile it. The trees were heavy with leaf and shed heavy scents of yellow acacia bloom, of rich ripe leaf, of fat resinous bark. Away from the road, where motor-cars perpetually buzzed past him in a medley of sound, where cyclists passed in thick groups behind their club leaders, tooting their horns and sometimes shaking enormous cow-bells, the artisans of Paris were preparing to picnic. They came in families, mostly adult, for the artisan who cares to afford the penny-halfpenny fare in the Métro has but few children.

One such family drew his attention. It seemed to be made up of a father in a frock-coat, grey trousers, yellow boots and a straw hat, of a mother, very capable-looking, in a tight white blouse which moulded her big bust, of two children, pale little precocious things whose bare legs seemed too white; with them were two men and a young woman, all of them inclined to laugh and to shout, an obvious horse-faced mother-in-law, also probably a maiden aunt and some elderly cousin with a grey moustache and the faded ribbon of the *médaille militaire* in his button-hole; above all and dominating them the old grandmother with an imperious air, who seemed to drag everywhere a bulging string bag. Some children who apparently belonged to nobody followed with hoops and tops, all very self-possessed.

The group passed through the trees shouting and wrangling. The two children quarrelled and were

parted with much screaming of "*Finis donc Mathilde*," and "*Louis, tais-toi, vilain*."

Henri watched them as he had never watched a family. It all seemed so spontaneous and easy, so different from the aged rigidity of his own home. It made him envious to see the big party settle at last near a thicket, ten yards from another family, unpack the string bag and the baskets, set out on a clean tablecloth the big uncut loaf, the butter (which had cruelly suffered on the way), the savoury sausages and the piece of cold roast beef (*rosbif*) from the *charcuterie*. It was a fine spread and a pretty, the white cloth on the grass, the red meat, the big Brie cheese flowing over the plate and the bottles of red wine. As he left the men were burying the bottles in earth hurriedly dug up to keep them cool. The laughter, the screaming of the children, the loud cries of "Mathilde," the shrill voice of the old grandmother, all pursued and haunted him until at last he discovered why he was stirred; he found that he was thinking of Suzanne, of a family he would found, of such joys as these, easy and graceful.

It was in a mood of depression that he faced the ordeal of lunch. Monsieur Duvernoy was in a particularly vicious mood, for his hatred of the Republic came to a head on days such as these.

"Going to the review?" he sniffed.

Henri hesitated, then compromised. "I'll go and see them come back in the Champs Elysées; it's such a fine day."

"Ahem! It's not much you'll see in the Champs Elysées except the President. A fine specimen, your Loubet! he'd have done better to stick to his *nougat*."

"He doesn't make *nougat*," said Henri, "every-

body doesn't make *nougat* in Montélimar. He's a *brave homme, le père Loubet*."

"Oh, don't talk of Loubet," interrupted Madame Duvernoy, "you know quite well your father doesn't like him."

"Well," said Henri, "it's not my fault if *papa* is a *Clérical*."

"Who said I was a *Clérical*?" stormed Monsieur Duvernoy, "I believe in liberty of conscience, which is more than your dirty band of Jews and Protestants and Freemasons do. You're a lot of tyrants and inquisitors, that's all, and call yourselves Republicans. King People indeed! so much for etymology . . . but I forget, the young generation doesn't learn Latin."

"Well, it learns German," said Madame Duvernoy aggressively, for nobody, not even her husband, was allowed to attack her son's education.

"Convenient for traitors," her husband grumbled, "to-day's the day of the *sans-patrie*. . . . What we want's another Christiani to demolish Loubet's head instead of his hat. Fortunately his term 'll be over next year."

"You won't get a better one," snarled Henri.

The wrangle continued throughout lunch. It was personal all through, for the old man could not forgive his son his Radical opinions and his incipient if formless Socialism. He saw no generosity but mere arrogant stupidity in the young man's yearning for some undefined social justice. His son, on the other hand, could not repress the contempt he felt for his father's attitude. He could not understand how he could set himself up as a friend of the clergy when he never attended Mass, for he was too direct to

accept that a man should defend the priests given that he was likely to enter a church but five times in his life: for his christening, *première communion* and marriage, and for his son's christening; he had only one more visit to pay, when he died, and this, the ordinary routine of French men, was repugnant to his agnostic son. After lunch the wrangle became more bitter still, for Monsieur Duvernoy's *Légion d'Honneur* was discussed. Henri inquired sardonically whether it had been given him by Philippe d'Orléans or Prince Victor, upon which his father flew into a rage, which was almost inarticulate because he had to explain that he owed it to a Radical *sénateur*. Madame Duvernoy was glad to see Henri go out immediately after he had swallowed his coffee.

The afternoon passed agreeably enough among the throngs that slowly filed up the glaring white pavement of the Champs Elysées. At four Henri found himself among the crowd in front of the Café de l'Alma. The traffic was streaming back from Longchamp now, in great serried masses of *fiacres* laden with families, long motor-cars and bold cyclists. The crowd pressed on him, chattered, quarrelled, while hawkers threaded their way through, selling handkerchiefs bearing patriotic designs and little fans known as *petits vents du Nord*. At last he heard shouting in the distance; it drew nearer, nearer still. *Vive Loubet! Vive la République*, shouted the mass. Then came two *cuirassiers* at a gallop, riding abreast, with revolvers in their gauntleted hands; thirty yards behind those modern lictors the President's guard, some forty *cuirassiers* in their gay breastplates and helmets and their bugler with his fine red horsehair streamer; then the President, in his simple carriage,

with the *Généralissime*, the Governor of Paris and the Minister for War. The kindly face of the old President was smiling as he regularly raised his hat while the crowd again shouted his name; a few whistles of hatred boldly blended with the shouts. Henri had lustily shouted *Vive Loubet! Vive la République*, with the rest; now the last *cuirassiers* were galloping by. Suddenly he heard his name called. He turned and could have cried out with delight, for a yard behind him, Suzanne stood on a chair. He leapt forward and seized her hand. Neither said a word, but just looked into each other's eyes.

"Don't you recognise me, Monsieur Duvernoy?" said a gentle voice.

Henri hastily looked away from Suzanne's face and blushed as he shook hands with Madame Bernay.

"Oh yes, yes," he muttered, "but I was so surprised."

"Agreeably?" asked Suzanne in a quizzical tone. Henri looked at her reproachfully. She seemed to him like a goddess on her pedestal; no one could have thought it was a fifty centimes hired chair.

"Help me," she said demurely. And as she extended her bare hand and Henri took it, both were accomplices in delaying for some seconds the moment when their hands must part.

"Isn't it fine?" asked Madame Bernay, still smiling, though she had understood.

"Oh, beautiful, beautiful." Henri felt rather intoxicated.

"I heard you shout *Vive la République!*" said Madame Bernay. "Young men of the present day are not so enthusiastic as a rule."

"Yes," said Henri, quite seriously, "I did shout." He looked at the two women with open blue eyes without at all realising that he was lovable if a little childish. Then he had to submit to be questioned.

"And, *Madame votre mère*? Is she well?"

"Yes, Madame, very well, thank you."

"And Monsieur Duvernoy? Always in good health?"

"Yes. Thanks. He's very well. And, Monsieur Bernay?"

"Very busy, very. Ah, Monsieur Duvernoy, you are lucky to be a lawyer. No anxieties, no hurry."

Henri assented, for he did not want to talk about health or business. He wanted to look at Suzanne, to stand very near her, so that the vast crowd, as it swirled about them, could press them close together. Suzanne, with unconscious complicity, favoured his design while her mother talked steadily in her soft voice; the girl looked up shyly from time to time and met with a half-smile the imploring and possessive eyes of her lover. They were very deeply stirred, those two, as they awkwardly stood side by side, thrilled whenever their hands touched.

Still Madame Bernay talked, of the lovely weather, of the hope she nursed of soon calling on Madame Duvernoy, of Monsieur Bernay's overworked condition. At last Suzanne forced herself to speak.

"We are going away soon," she said, "we are going to Pourville."

"You . . . you are going to Pourville!" Henri faltered, "but then . . . we . . ."

"Oh, nothing is settled, nothing is settled. Suzanne, you ought not to have said that."

"*Maman*," Suzanne whispered hurriedly, "it

doesn't matter. I know, and you know that . . . that Monsieur Duvernoy will be at Dieppe . . . and of course we mustn't talk about it because . . ."

"Oh, there's no reason why we shouldn't," said the mother lightly, "still, you understand . . . people might think . . ."

Henri listened blankly to the quick interchange of sentences. Then he began to understand that he was being told something, that they were letting him into a plot. It was delicious.

"Oh," he blurted out, "oh, of course, Madame, I understand. . . . I shan't say anything. . . . You see, my parents, they . . ." He looked round him desperately, afraid to wound and yet seeking expression; he wanted so badly to be frank. The crowd streamed round them careless and absorbed, dragging chairs, screaming to cover the din; the ceaseless flow of conveyances went by under the heavy blue sky. A rigid look came over Suzanne's face.

"*Maman*, please speak to him; please."

Madame Bernay turned on the young man her sad eyes and smiled in her tired way between the fine wrinkles near her mouth.

"Monsieur Duvernoy," she said, "I like you. I know what you want, for Suzanne has told me. She tells me that your parents . . . well, that your parents want to think the idea over. All I can say is that I shall not object."

Henri suddenly felt in his a hot little trembling hand.

"My husband," Madame Bernay pursued, as if she did not see, "knows nothing; but I do not think he would refuse Suzanne anything. He has never done so yet."

And then, as if the crowd played a queer sacramental part in the betrothal, a swirl of holiday-makers encircled the group, pressed against them and threw into the young man's arms the willing form of the girl whose hand he held in his.

IV

Still the guns were booming from the distant Champ de Mars and from the Mont-Valérien as Henri idly turned into the little *place* near the end of the Rue Marbeuf. In honour of the "14 Juillet" the pork-butcher had suspended tricolour streamers over his shop front; from many windows depended flags, whilst the melancholy dog who once was white tried by rolling in the dust to remove the blue dye from his haunches and the scarlet from his head: his ostler master had sacrificed him on the altar of patriotism. Already some twenty couples were dancing, while a hundred more stood in a circle watching them and laughing as they waltzed to the tune of the two municipal fiddlers and the clarionet volunteer.

The musicians sat on a little platform draped with flags, just in front of the little café; once a year they were requisitioned by the *Conseil Municipal* to incite the citizens to dance in the open air under the eye, annually benevolent, of the two *sergents de ville* who are compelled by tradition to allow this outrage on public order. It was warm and the air was silent in spite of the laughter and the scrape of the two-score feet on the wood pavement. The couples comprised mainly menservants, big fellows with coal-black whiskers, and neat maids in black with the

ugly faces, bright eyes and graceful figures of French girls; mixed in with them a few workgirls, seamstresses; some shopkeepers who often stopped to mop their bald heads as they danced with their good-tempered square wives; a neat clerk or two in very tight dark clothes and very high collars; a soldier, perspiring horribly in his thick black *veste* and heavy white-gaitered shoes.

Henri watched them good-humouredly, watched too the reflection on the black star-spangled sky of the red fires of the Eiffel Tower; he could hear, together with the distant guns, the occasional sharp crack of a rocket, for fireworks were being let off far and near: in the Champ de Mars, on the Buttes Chaumont, in the Tuileries gardens. The dancers grew in numbers, as couple after couple gained courage and entered the ring. Soon, as the municipal fiddlers persistently fiddled, the crowd became excited, laughed hysterically, found fun in gentle Latin rowdiness. During a break, granted the musicians so that they might drink abundantly from the *litres* of red wine placed beside their chairs, Henri found himself in a group and talking to a little dark girl.

"You don't dance, Monsieur?" she asked.

"Like a bear, Mademoiselle," said Henri easily. He liked her round dark face, her tight white blouse with its well-boned neck. "Still, if you will tame the animal . . ."

"With pleasure, Monsieur," she said, with false demureness. "As soon as the music begins. I love dancing, don't you? Do you ever go to balls? I do often, to the Bal Wagram. Do you know it?"

"Oh yes, I know it well," said Henri, who knew the Bal Wagram as being popular among the aris-

tocracy of the Champs Elysées servants' halls. "I often go," he plunged.

"*Tiens*, I've never seen you."

"You might forget," said Henri archly.

"Perhaps," said the coquette. But she did not mean it; she was sure she could not forget the young man's large blue eyes and his little red moustache. And he was so fine and big. "We must dance there. *Ah, la musique!*"

The untiring fiddlers struck up and Henri whirled into the dance with his little partner. She was frank, agreeable, and he liked to feel in his hand her short plump fingers. At times she looked up at him and smiled archly.

"I'm at the pastrycook's in the Rue Pierre Charron," she confided to him. "My name is Adèle. And you?"

"Oh. I . . . Léopold," Henri lied without knowing why.

"That's nice, Monsieur Léopold," said Adèle. And as the laughing eyes looked up at him he felt ashamed of his lie, for the girl chattered quite innocently. Her work was very hard, she said, for she was at the *pâtisserie* every day from eight in the morning to nine in the evening and was paid two francs a day.

"You must be very unhappy," said Henri, as they danced.

"I? Oh no; I live at home. *Papa* is *au ministère* and *maman* mends lace. So I can put three francs fifty in the savings bank every week."

"You'll have quite a *dot* to marry on when you're grown up," said Henri.

"I am grown up," said the girl indignantly. "I'm twenty, but I don't want to marry. Marriage is a

blague; ¹ men are all the same, like *papa*: he's fifty and *maman* knows he deceives her."

"But it's awful," said Henri, genuinely perturbed. They were standing in the crowd now, for the waltz was over. "I'd never deceive my wife."

"Oh, that's what you all say," replied Adèle, "but you're all the same. Any petticoat turns your heads. But it's all the same; if you don't care it doesn't matter, and if a man runs after the girls it's better than if he drinks. A man must do something, *pas?*"

Henri was shocked at this precocious cynicism and, when again he danced with Adèle, tried to convert her to the idealistic attitude. But the Paris gutter philosophy was too much for him: Adèle knew quite well that men deceived; that women lied, that "that sort of thing was all right in novels, but that wasn't life," and that when all was said and done there was nothing like putting away three francs fifty every week. Like Javal, like Madame Duvernoy, like France, she knew that cash was the thing.

Henri danced with another partner, a large jolly woman, probably a cook, vaguely feeling that he condescended, but so inwardly joyful that he liked the sensation. Then he returned to Adèle, who quite openly rested her head against his shoulder as they danced. At last he drew her apart, suggested she must be thirsty and took her to the café opposite the *Pont de l'Alma* to drink some *grenadine*. He was absurdly happy; he longed to tell the girl about Suzanne, but he had to laugh instead when she made faces at him as she sucked the syrup through a straw. Besides, it struck him that it would almost be treachery. Even later, when he took her back to

¹ "Spoof;" "tommy rot."

Chaillot, he felt awkward, afraid that a friend would see him, cold.

"You mustn't come any further," said Adèle suddenly. She stopped inside a porch, looked up and down the silent street.

"Good-bye," said Henri quickly, "I . . . thanks so much . . . we must meet again. . . . Shall I come and buy cakes?"

"Yes, do," said the girl; "good-bye."

Henri held out his hand. The girl took it, held it and smiled up at him with a pout. She looked so appealing and provoking that he threw his arm round her firm shoulders and tried to kiss her lips. But she laughed and eluded him.

"No, no," she said, "on the cheek, Monsieur, on the cheek, we're not yet *fiancés*."

And Henri, humouring the curious mixture of facility and reserve characteristic of French girls, pressed his lips to the soft warm cheek. But the memory of that innocent caress weighed so heavily on his conscience that he told Javal some days later. Javal was amazed, for Henri's thin-skinned loyalty was beyond his type of mind, ended by calling him an idiot and by telling him that he couldn't be a man if, after beginning so well, he stopped until he had nothing left to desire.

But Henri never went to buy those cakes.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

PARIS-SUR-MER

I

DEVONSHIRE is Devonshire; the coast of Maine is itself; but Dieppe is not Dieppe—it is Paris. It is more Paris than Brighton is London, however much Brighton's bandstands, parades, hotels and public-houses may compete with Earl's Court and the Edgware Road. For Brighton seems to forget itself, to blossom out into girls with wet hair and men with yachting caps and telescopes (they cannot see through the telescopes), but Dieppe does none of these things. The dominant English have come and have imposed upon the reluctant little city afternoon tea, golf and Doultoniana; but even they have failed to get the starch out of it, for Dieppe has an air. Perhaps the salt west wind blows at times along its terrace without imperilling a poised Paris hat; possibly, even, there are wrecks; but of these things the world knows nothing, for there is no Dieppe excepting from June to October. After October it ceases to be a town, and becomes a place where they catch fish. During the season it is hard to believe that the inhabitants do anything so primitive.

The topography of Dieppe is singularly undistinguished. It lies between two masses of cliff on a plain where the little Scie pleasantly meanders through

gardens and drains and under many bridges—in fact, anywhere except through real fields. It has a harbour which pretends to be a fishing centre and succeeds merely in being a junction; it has a fish market, golf links, a race-course; it has two churches, and smells very bad. But that is hardly Dieppe, it is merely the background of the real Dieppe, the Dieppe we begin to suspect as we walk along the Grand Rue and count the innumerable pastrycooks; it is quite clear that the background has no need of the pastrycooks, nor of the booksellers, the hosiers and restaurants. Those things pertain to the front, the atmosphere of which becomes all the more evident as, leaving the Grande Rue behind, you make for the sea: the town bursts into apartments, into the solemnity of houses, lastly into hotels.

From east to west the hotels stand in a serried row, occupying almost every inch of space between the western cliff, upon which stands the castle, and the eastern, where is the harbour. These natural conditions are, no doubt, responsible for the fact that there is but half-a-mile or so of hotels. They stand, new and arrogant, all white stone and glazed winter gardens, with wonderful trim front gardens ("tiled"), and flagstaffs, and liveried porters, and motors and all that goes with motors. Indeed they are hotels; there is nothing to show that they have not been transported as they stood from Folkestone Leas or the Ostend *digue*. In front of the masters of them all, on the west, lies the heart of real Dieppe, the Casino.

Few towns on the French coast are without their Casino, a place which, however humbly built of planks or corrugated iron, affords the Parisian a room in which to dance and another in which to lose a franc

on the *petits chevaux*. But the Dieppe Casino is of quite another order; it is an organisation. It is known that it never sleeps, that it will feed anybody at any time, allow them to write their letters and post them within its boundaries, to play tennis and croquet, to read papers in seven languages, to attend concerts, dances, plays, and punch-and-judy shows, to take baths in which the sea has no place, to play *petits chevaux* and baccarat. Possibly you may live there if you be in high favour with the real Dieppe, in which case you need no longer be concerned with the rest of France: until October comes and they put Dieppe into holland covers the Casino will look after you.

The Casino is wonderfully Turkish, with its cupola and its minarets, and it stands incongruously in gardens which are wholly *anglais* (which is the French translation of Dutch), except where they merge into bushes, well nooked and provided with little chairs for the English misses to flirt on after their cavaliers have blinded with a franc the sedulous watchman. In front of it lies the *Terrasse*, the heart, the arcanum of Dieppe. Seen in the early morning, the *Terrasse* is unimposing, for it appears as a five-hundred-foot strip of asphalt, lying between the Casino and the sea; it is raised some three yards over the shingle and walled off, so that the vulgar may not defile it. Below are the bathing-boxes, a tumbled crowd of them, while in front lies the *estacade*, a little wooden pier designed for bathing and not for long distance walks. But as the morning wanes the *Terrasse* begins to be. First come the English, with their national paraphernalia of golf clubs, rackets and balls, tall young men, mostly clean shaven, and linen-clad girls, with towels and Tauchnitzes. They pace the *Terrasse* uncomfort-

ably, for they despise the little cane chairs, and they are worried by the Frenchness as exemplified by the coal-haired waiters; at times they stop to sneer at the flagstaff where no flag floats, which means "no bathing," for the sea is choppy. England is hanged if it's going to stand that! Later, the French: Monsieur in blue serge coat and white ducks—very tight white ducks, and a straw hat that might have fitted him when he was fourteen; Madame, *très chic*, all steel corset and long white shoe; sometimes Marcel and sometimes Jeanne, seldom both, always very conscious of their striped linen suits or stiff frills, all bare leg and decorum. Later still, the *élite*, a cosmopolitan group which revolves round a lady who paints flowers well and makes useful acquaintances divinely. That is not a noticeable group: it is so cosmopolitan that it has to average and pretend to be English; it numbers a Portuguese painter, an Italian architect, the sister of a great English artist, an English actress who looks very French, a French art critic and his lovely daughter, together with another cadaverous critic, some Frenchmen who hang on and some Jews who own motors. Slowly, as the *élite* draws apart and forms small groups at the café or on the abominable tennis court, the *Terrasse* becomes crowded with Paris-on-Sea: smart women, whose complexions will not let them bathe; natty youths who take off their hats with care, lest the wind should destroy their partings. There is bowing and there is meeting, there is walking up and down for ever on the asphalt strip, while in the bandstand a small but lusty group thunders in turn Wagner and Messenger. The hats are perfect, hands are gloved, faces veiled; as the morning passes, the English girls slink by, a little

ashamed of their flying strands of hair, their unlaced shoes and unbuttoned blouses, while the French women view through their lorgnon this savage race.

In the afternoon too they pace up and down, waiting for the concert or the children's ball; the *élite* have gone far afield in the Jews' motor-cars to visit the lighthouse at Ailly, or eat *galette* at Pourville, or visit at Arques the white rabbits of Henri IV; the English, also, have gone, no doubt to play their barbarous games; but the French are there, in different clothes, daughters and young men and old men, under the eye of the mothers. And as the day passes and the task of it is done, the bathers watched diving and swimming about the *estacade*, the Paris papers read, the one franc fifty tea avoided, they return to the half-mile of hotels to put on different clothes.

In the evening the red sun has gone, and the sea is malachite green. Upon the shingle, in the moonlight, lie little trails of foam, like coruscating garlands of crusted opals. Dieppe is not resting, for in the big ball-room two hundred couples are dancing, and in the baccarat-room a crowd is watching the English actress win, and envying the way in which she makes her dresses meet at the back. The *Terrasse* is quiet and silent, for it is cold, and the French fear the treachery of the air. It is empty, except for an English boy and girl who walk up and down laughing. Perhaps, behind the bandstand, they stop and abruptly kiss.

II

Henri Duvernoy slowly toiled up the steep of Caude-Côte. He had left behind at the Casino his

father, who was safely occupied with a system at the *petits chevaux*, and his mother, who liked to shelter her conversation with her friends in the concert-room. Monsieur Duvernoy's system was not very sound, for it consisted in placing a franc on one band and a franc on some number of the opposite band; this gave him the joy of having five chances out of nine of seeing one of his numbers succeed, but the combination was hardly remunerative, for four of these numbers left him quits, one of them a winner of six francs, and the remaining four numbers a loser of two francs. But he was blissfully certain that there was something in it. As for Madame Duvernoy, she was happy in the idea that Henri was forgetting Suzanne, for he seemed cheerful, and never mentioned her.

If Madame Duvernoy had seen her son walking smartly out of Dieppe in the hot August night, she would not have felt so comfortable. Henri passed through the long, straggling street where most houses were unlit, went by the *octroi* and its sleepy watchman, then left the high road to follow the precipitous little path through the wood. Half-a-dozen steps further and he was in the night. Right and left ran the high clay banks covered with undergrowth and crowned with embowering trees. It was a silent road, save for the sighing of its trees. He walked quickly over the rutted clay, instinctively keeping to the middle of the road, and a little nervous in the dark. He thought of tramps and snakes, and at times looked up anxiously to the purple sky, of which he could see a strip between the tree-tops. He did not like the earthy smell of the moss-grown clay; it suggested a graveyard. Still he went on, with a beating heart, for joy waited him far off on the edge of

Pourville; it was good to see the top of the road, and then the broader expanse of dark sky. He reached the top, passed quickly by his parents' villa, for he did not care to be caught by Marie or Charlotte: he need have had no fear, as Marie was in the kitchen mending his own under-clothes, Eugénie had gone to bed, while Charlotte, whose black eyes had aroused interest in a young farmer, was a good way down the lane that leads to St. Aubin. Still, he went by hurriedly, keeping well in the shadow of the hedge. He left the villa behind (a horrid imitation of the Renaissance style built for Americans), passed three more houses, then the golf links, their black pavilion and the famous eighty-foot bunker. Now he was in the open country on the top of the cliff, walking on the high road between the broad dry fields; he met nothing except a motor-car, which flashed by him in a blaze of acetylene lamps. The night was heavy and without stars, but enveloping and warm with the reminiscence of the day; the grasshoppers sang merrily in the grass.

As Henri walked he thought of Suzanne, whom he was in a few minutes going to hear, to touch, to hold in his arms. Four days had elapsed since his arrival and his secret was still his, for Madame Bernay's tacit complicity had kept her at Pourville while Madame Duvernoy confidingly remained at Dieppe. He wondered whether this would last, whether conflict could be avoided, and reluctantly recognised that a meeting must take place, that Madame Bernay and Suzanne would be compelled by friends to enter Dieppe. He saw the distant lights of Pourville now. By which light could Suzanne be sitting? He walked for another quarter of an hour by the furze-grown com-

mon, coming at last to the outposts of the mushroom townlet. He stopped to light a match to examine the plan Suzanne had sent him. Yes, the fourth house, that must be the Villa Beaulieu. He passed three houses, turned up a flagged path, arrived at a gate and, striking another match, read the witching name.

"Follow the wall towards the sea," said the instructions. "Climb the palings at the end and turn to the left. When you come to a tree, stop, and then mew three times." With a beating heart, Henri struck into the soft spongy building land, following the white wall. He found the palings, and, as he climbed them, was annoyed by the obstacle, for the palings felt mouldy and would do his trousers no good. He dropped on the other side, trod in a pool of mud and mildly swore . . . then he ran to the tree, and, as he reached it, heard the chime of eleven o'clock carried by the west wind from Pourville's little church. He hesitated for a second, as if some unconscious sybaritism bade him beg the fleeting moment tarry, then mewed three times.

There was no reply. He was too oppressed by anxiety to reflect how unpoetic was the summons: but then both he and Suzanne were of the town, and could not signal to one another with the cry of the night-owl or the trill of the nightingale. Would she come? Perhaps she had been caught. Perhaps she had not heard. He mewed again, louder. He wondered what he should do if she did not come; he felt a vague impulse to scale the wall, but then it looked rather high. There was a faint sound, and Henri gave a little cry, for a ghostly white face appeared; it looked at him over the wall.

It was Suzanne. For a second those two gazed

into each other's eyes; he could see her better now, discern in the faint light the pools of her black eyes. He drew nearer, held up his hands, dimly saw the lovely lips smile. She seemed to raise herself up, to throw her arms over the wall, and then Henri knew only that he held in his those slim hands, that he was pressing against his lips their warm, scented palms, desperately kissing them.

"Henri," whispered Suzanne at last, "just behind you there is a cask. I saw it this morning, but it was too heavy for me to move. Roll it to the wall and stand on it."

Henri found the cask, seized the heavy thing without realising its weight and carried it to the wall in his arms, bruising his face against the rough wood. He leapt on it, and now overtopped the wall and Suzanne, who was standing on the hen-house. Then, without a word, he clasped his arms round her, felt her lay her head against his chest. A very long time seemed to pass in wonderful quietude, during which neither thought, for both were happy as they felt upon their faces the soft sweep of their breath. At last Henri moved, took in one hand the girl's chin and harshly kissed her unresisting lips. She shivered a little, freed herself and drew back, still smiling but frightened by his passion. But he held her hands again, and they smiled at each other.

"I am so happy," whispered Suzanne.

"*Suzette . . . ma Suzie . . .*" said Henri. He felt a queer, inexplicable joy in the distortion of her name, the joy that all lovers have in baby talk invented for the loved one.

"I must not stay long. . . . Listen, there goes the quarter. Mother does not know."

"She would not mind," said Henri; "she is our friend."

"Yes . . . still, I am not doing right. She would scold me if she knew. I am supposed to be in bed."

And Henri realised, with overpowering joy, that she was lightly clad in something soft and purple like the night; it was a shock, and he felt a pang of remorse when he realised how brutally he had kissed this girl who had trusted him. He freed one of his hands and softly caressed her loose dark hair.

"I am happy, I am happy," Suzanne murmured; "it was dreadful not seeing you and wondering whether you would come. Oh, I knew you would," she added quickly, as a harder clasp of his hand protested; "but still one is like that when one . . . when one . . . loves."

Again Henri bent his head down and kissed her, but this time she did not draw away. Indeed, she slipped one hand over his neck and held him so that he could feel her tremble against him, while her fingers twitched nervously on his cheek.

They talked, too innocent to see how they vulgarised the unforgettable, of the harshness of Henri's parents, of Madame Bernay and the value of her alliance, of the days to come, when their battle was won, of Dieppe, even, of bathing, of tennis, then again of love, of which they knew nothing except that kisses were good. They guessed, though, that they must hold close to each other, for they were greedy of these little contacts, which are so much greater in their significance than anything the mere fulfilment of passion can give. The half-hour struck.

"Oh . . . I must go . . ." Suzanne whispered.

"No, no; not yet."

"Yes, I must; if I were found out, it would be dreadful."

"No, no." Henri detained her by force, and gladly she resigned herself into his hands.

"You are strong," she said at last. "I wonder whether that is why I love you."

"Perhaps," said Henri. It made him glad to be strong and to have her acknowledge it. "I love you because . . . I don't know why. You're beautiful . . . and graceful . . . and clever . . . you're everything."

She gave a happy sigh and nestled closer against him. At last she looked at him with serious eyes.

"You must let me go," she said. "Really."

He looked at her, mutely appealing, but she remained stern.

"I am cold," she said, and shivered.

At once Henri thought himself a brute.

"Yes, yes, you must go in," he said hurriedly; "but, Suzanne, my Suzanne, I will come again to-morrow?"

"No . . . no, we might be caught. I must find out first what mother is going to do; I will write to you. There . . . good-night, you may kiss me again."

For a long minute those two, who had found joy, clasped each other. They kissed and then again they clasped, muttering brokenly each other's name. They felt a subtle but penetrating pleasure in repeating the loved word. At last Suzanne tore herself away.

"Good-bye," she whispered as she leapt down from the hen-house.

There were tears in her eyes as she turned towards the house. But Henri as he slowly went home found that his body was light, his step springy; as he walked

he softly moved his lips against each other and strove to evoke in them the memory of her caress.

III

The heavenly days numbered three. On every one Henri walked to Pourville in the night through the ratty little lane, climbed the palings and stood on the cask to clasp his beloved in his arms. There was no jar, no fearing and trembling, almost immunity from detection. Indeed, security might have tamed and vulgarised his passion; he might have looked upon the walk under the stars first as a joy, then as a pleasure; by infinite gradations it might have become an agreeable habit, until, by still slower gradations, his desires had been exasperated and balked so sourly that passion would have fled. It was not to be. The stars shone over his head, or the soft canopy of night shed coolness upon his hot brow, for the elements themselves seemed to love the lovers, to bathe them in fair winds laden with the salt of the sea and the scent of summer blooms. It did not rain; no inimical dog barked, nor did watchful man intrude upon these blissful snatched moments.

Henri was not, however, content with moments, with the ephemeral ravishment of feeling in his those slim hands. Pourville drew him irresistibly, for he might there see her unawares and wonder whether she thought of him when her eyes looked out upon the sea. Once, as he lay upon the low cliff, he saw her speaking to two young men; they laughed, he could see their teeth gleaming through the clear air though he could not hear them, and it was horrible that Suzanne should

laugh when he was not there to watch the red lips curl, the white teeth part a little, the long full throat swell as the small head was thrown back. He got up and practically crawled away. And that night, as he held her close, he confessed his pains with tears in his voice, was scolded as a child, and as a child comforted with caresses. Still he was moody, oddly gay and oddly sorrowful; his sudden disappearances, too, disturbed Madame Duvernoy, until it struck her that he probably had an affair. It was not for nothing, she reflected, that a young man deserted his mother half the day, and never returned before one in the morning. Her innocent conclusion disturbed her a little, but she was comforted. She liked to think of Henri as fickle, for any division meant weakness, and she was an astute enough general to know that while she might be beaten by Suzanne alone, she could defeat her easily if Henri's sentimental army were divided. It was not pleasant to think that Henri had in his life a woman other than herself, but, as she reluctantly told herself, she could not be both mother and sweetheart to him: thus it was better that his amours should be many, for he might have many loves but only one mother, and the unique mother would be queen.

Thus she made no remarks, preferred no claims to his society, accepted calmly clumsy apologies for his absence. She attached herself to her own friends and was everywhere seen with them, at eleven on the *estacade* to watch the barbarian English girls dive, without indiarubber bonnets, at three on the *Terrasse*, with a yellow-back and a polite youth, in the evening at the *petits chevaux* or in the baccarat-room. But a week after her arrival she made up a small party with

chance acquaintances to go to Pourville in the omnibus which enticingly dawdles at the Café des Tribunaux. It was cheap, one franc fifty (for oneself; one does not treat people whose grandfather has not been to school with yours), and at the end was the inexpensive sensation of a *goûter* at Graff's or *galette* and syrup and a fivepenny flutter at the elementary *petits chevaux*.

It was fine, and Monsieur Marzelle amiable. Madame Marzelle, fair and fat, followed giggling behind with Javal, whose interest in women never flagged, scandalised and delighted by his mild audacities.

"It's a fine view," said Monsieur Marzelle, as he stroked his black beard.

"Yes, lovely," said Madame Duvernoy. It was lovely, the curving little blue bay and the hurrying little river which threw itself into its arms.

"This country is not yet spoiled," said Monsieur Marzelle. "It is still full of legends. These fishermen are so picturesque."

"Yes," said Madame Duvernoy, "they are fine-looking men. It's a pity that they smell of fish."

"If you say that, Madame," interposed Javal, "it only means you've been too near to them."

"*Oh, Monsieur,*" gasped the fat Madame Marzelle, "you do say dreadful things. *C'est abominable.*"

"What will you?" the young man whispered with a meaning look; "there are hours . . . there are moments when one is not responsible."

Monsieur Marzelle was quite unaware of the by-play. His was a practical mind.

"All the same," he said, "these places are very backward. Look at all that building-land! What's it worth?—a franc a yard, not that. The houses are

built anyhow by any one who can put up six thousand francs, and they haven't even got the sense to buy a big plot. Now what we want here is a good hotel, a really good hotel; there's a good place there, where you see the old brown fishermen's cottages. Something solid, you know, with a winter garden and a verandah for a band. That 'ud wake the place up, don't you think so?"

"Yes, you're quite right," murmured Madame Duvernoy.

Funny, she seemed to know that woman sitting with a book at the end of the *établissement de bains*.

"And transit facilities," resumed the practical Monsieur Marzelle, still oblivious of his wife, into whose large and rosy ear Javal was now whispering. "We want a railway, say from Rouxmesnil, and . . . why, with a capital of a million or so I'd have this place humming in a year with baccarat, the Paris papers by ten o'clock, and a branch of the Crédit Lyonnais, and . . ."

Monsieur Marzelle stopped abruptly, for Madame Duvernoy had broken into his ameliorative plans with a hoarse ejaculation. A slim girlish figure in white had joined the woman on the chair.

"You said, Madame?" he asked politely.

"Nothing, nothing," said Madame Duvernoy, with immense courage. "Go on, it's very interesting."

Monsieur Marzelle gladly went on. While he talked and Madame Duvernoy replied with yeses and noes to suggestions for the development of Pourville, her brain worked at a furious pace. Suzanne here, and she did not know. Why did she not know? And did Henri know? But . . . it was an awful idea . . . these unexplained absences of his. . . . There was

something in it; yes, that was what it meant, it was a plot, a dastardly plot engineered by that designing woman. Oh, it was intolerable!

Madame Marzelle laughed out loud; Monsieur Marzelle pounded on with his plan; Javal, without apparent design, touched Madame Marzelle's fat arm, but Madame Duvernoy was horribly conscious of this only, that Madame Bernay and Suzanne were now slowly walking towards her. She felt impelled to fly, but she courageously stiffened her straight back. No, she wasn't going to run away.

"Let us go on to the Casino," she said evenly enough, and took a step forward towards the enemy.

The two groups grew closer to each other. Madame Duvernoy saw recognition flash in Madame Bernay's eyes, a deep blush cover Suzanne's face and neck. The girl looked away, and Madame Duvernoy closed her jaws with a snap. When, however, but three yards separated the two mothers, they remembered: the one that she must try and capture for Suzanne the rich young man, the other that the great railway case was not over. The two women crossed glances, then allowed their lips to relax, nodded amiably and smiled. It was over.

"Friends of yours?" said Madame Marzelle.

"Yes . . . *Madame Bernay et sa fille*," said Madame Duvernoy.

"*Des gens charmants*," she added, with an effort.

It was splendid.

IV

Madame Duvernoy did not obtain much of the satisfaction she considered due to her outraged

maternal feelings. When she taxed Henri with having deceived her he was not surprised, for he knew that a meeting was inevitable sooner or later. He was merely sulky.

"Well," he replied at last, after his mother had upbraided him for some ten minutes, "what was I to do? It was no use telling you, you'd only have made a fuss as you do now. I thought I'd better chance your not meeting them."

"Yes, and sneak round there behind my back. Nice to find a thing like that in my only son. Oh, of course I know it's not all your fault, my poor boy: they know what they're doing; they want to entangle you because nobody 'll have their girl."

"*Maman!*"

"Yes, that's their game. I should have thought you'd have known enough of the world by now to see through it. Madame Bernay is a harpy, and her daughter . . . well, she's no better."

"I won't have anything said against her."

Madame Duvernoy was shaken; she did not like his tone nor the sudden flash of his eyes. Still, she pluckily bullied him as a man strikes his bulldog again when he growls, even though he fear the beast.

"You're mean, and you're deceitful," she panted. "You go on with this affair in defiance to me, to your duty. You're a bad son, and . . . oh, you've made me so unhappy."

She was almost crying, and Henri, feeling horribly guilty, knelt by her side. She repulsed him, however, for he could not resign his love any more than she could humble her pride. They were hideously wedged, unable to move without hurting each other;

passionately desirous of healing, all they could do was to wound. The eternal tragedy of rival loves held them and tortured them for its own obscure purposes; it demanded inexorably that opposition should refine and intensify the young man's passion so that he might more strenuously desire the woman chosen for him by the life force; it demanded also that the older woman should fight against the gluttonous young, so that she might be ground and more easily killed off, so that the time might be hurried when the young could thrust her out and seize her possessions for the upbringing of the unborn race. They were not conscious, either of them, of their representative quality, for it did not suit the force to let them know that theirs was not the tragedy of the world; the force needed all their sincerity, so that they might fight well and fight hard, so that it might reap the spoils.

Madame Duvernoy lay awake in the night after the drawn battle. She was alone; in her despair she had thought of telegraphing to her husband, but at a *sou* a word the telegram would have been rather dear; instead she had written to him begging him to abandon the railway case. But Monsieur Duvernoy was not to be her comforter, for he recklessly wired the next day. The message held out no hope; it merely ran: "Do not be ridiculous."

V

August still hung heavy over the coast, and the sea began to swell as if conscious of the coming equinoctial tide. It lay in the sun like liquid lead corrugated by faint winds. On the shingle beach

hundreds of red and white umbrellas and tents flourished for the comfort of the holiday-makers as they crowded on the east side, where a bath cost only five *sous*. It was gay and petty and light; and it was cheap, as are careful French pleasures. Both at the *petits bains mixtes* and at the *petits bains des dames* the summer crowds watched good-humouredly the daring folk who waded up to their waist in the still waters, and saw them come out without being impelled to jeer, as the Anglo-Saxon would be. Some bold swimmers, needy, but snobs even in the sea, did not hesitate to traverse the four hundred yards which separated them from the *estacade*, and to dive to exhaustion in the sevenpenny-halfpenny baths.

There was gaiety in the air, in the bronzed man crowned by a forage cap who sold sticks of barley-sugar, in the little Savoyard and Italian boys who staggered over the shingle carrying on their backs the *plaisir* tub and its lottery wheel which the gambler may whirl for a *sou* to win, perchance, thirty light cakelets, or perchance one. The French were enjoying themselves, fathers, mothers, children and mongrel dogs, aunts and cousins and old grandmothers and old grandfathers with the *médaille militaire* ribbon in their button-holes. The plebeian side of Dieppe indulged in an unspeakable orgy of family affection. They clustered solemnly round a red umbrella and the mother of the family, their gonfalonier; they tended to quarrel, to eat heavily of sausage and to drink little, to tell in presence of their daughters the kind of stories the daughters of the Anglo-Saxons tell one another when alone. They sat in the sun, sweated, made wordy love between the courses of sausage and were singularly averse

to kissing in public, for in these matters they are a discreet race.

Henri was shut off from the gaiety. For one thing, he belonged to the Casino set without knowing the English, which meant that he must be a *jeune homme bien élevé*, wear Paris clothes, change three times a day, talk of Parisian plays with Parisian women who valiantly wore Parisian heels. There were for him no flannel shirts and wet hair, nor ungloved hands, nor pipes, nor unsuspended socks: those things were for the barbarian English only. Besides, his mother now kept him in check, so that he could no longer go to Pourville. Every day the same conversation took place.

"Where are you going to this afternoon, Henri?"

"I? I don't know. I thought of going for a walk."

"Where?"

"I don't know." Obviously he could not say Pourville.

"Then you may as well come with me to the concert."

"I'd rather go for a walk."

"Very well, *chéri*, I'll go with you."

And Madame Duvernoy, unless her son at the last moment resigned himself to sitting in the Turkish-bath concert-room where Paris-sur-Mer breathes sea air, accompanied him valiantly on his expeditions. A tacit convention directed these towards the south, to Arques, or towards the east, to Puits or Berneval: Pourville was left out. Henri was so miserably conscious of his impotence that Suzanne's letters could not cheer him, for he was spied upon, watched, in leading strings. The Marzelles had been told of the affair by some busybody and tortured him with hints;

Madame Marzelle, greedily desirous of every man's attentions, could not forgive him his love for another woman, and she too watched him, persecuted him.

"*Bonjour, Monsieur Duvernoy*," she would say sweetly when she met him in the morning, "are you not going for an excursion to-day?"

"Perhaps, yes, it is so fine."

"Ah, yes, to Pourville, no doubt; such a charming spot."

"Yes . . . oh yes, it's very pretty."

"And they say there are charming people there," the vixen would add.

Sometimes Henri was rather rude.

Henri's one ally was Javal, not a very keen or sympathetic ally, for the dark youth still considered the affair idiotic. But after all he was Henri's friend, and all intrigues were agreeable to him. Henri entrusted to him his secret means of access to Suzanne.

"*Hein?*" asked Javal, with sudden interest, "do you go every night?"

"I haven't been for five days, since my mother found out. She's watching me, I can't go."

"What?" shouted Javal. "Does she sleep on your doormat?"

"No . . . but what do you mean, Javal? . . . Oh, I say, that's an idea."

"*Tu es idiot, absolument idiot*. If you want to see your girl, what prevents you from getting out at twelve or so? She'd come."

"Do you think so?" Henri asked, with a beating heart.

"*Parbleu!* I assure you her friend, *la belle Morenda*, she's not above it."

"Letitia?"

"Yes, Letitia. I've been there myself; don't you know she's staying at the Bernays' villa?"

"No, I didn't know, Suzanne didn't tell me."

"No, I suppose not, you were too busy. Oh, don't fly out," he added petulantly, as a red-brown wave of colour rose to Henri's face, "I know you're a saint, and Suzanne too; now Letitia and I . . . well . . ."

"Javal! You don't suggest . . .?"

"Well, we're not all like you," said Javal negligently. He was lying; he could not bear to have it thought that Letitia resisted him; if she had yielded to him he would not, any more than any of his compatriots, have hesitated to drag her name through the mud: as she had plainly told him at their last meeting that her terms were marriage, the lie was almost a revenge.

Henri was depressed by this conversation. He liked Letitia, and it was enough to know that Suzanne was her friend for him to idealise her; the thought that an impure woman could be near the pearl of the world was intolerable to him. When two nights later he followed Javal's advice, after making an appointment with Suzanne through the faithful Jeanne Bréguet, he tried to broach the subject. But the words would not come; he could not talk to his beloved of these vile things. He could only hold her in his arms, breathe into her ears protestations of love, inflame her courage and his own. August was passing, nothing was done. Soon they would return to Paris and the weary round would again begin, the dullness and the battles and the hopeless strife.

Monsieur Duvernoy arrived just before the races, but he too avoided the subject. He settled it with his wife in very few words.

"No nonsense," he said, with unwonted energy.

"Jules," said his wife fiercely, "it's getting worse. He's been seeing her at Pourville. For what I know he's seeing her still: I can't watch him day and night."

"It can't be helped. He can't marry without our consent."

"But, Jules, he may compromise her . . . there'll be a scandal."

"*Hein?* Compromise her? Let him. I don't care if he does: it won't hurt him, and . . . if I know anything against Bernay, anything I can use, whatever happens I'll keep his case."

Madame Duvernoy was silent. Yes, that was a strong argument.

VI

At last August was drawing to an end. Race week had come, that week so different from the other fifty-one, when Dieppe knows greatness, deliriously feasts in anticipation of the fast to come. Fishing Dieppe was completely swamped by the real Dieppe as the latter streamed in by every train, packed into the half-mile of hotels, overflowed into the villas on the little hills, into the apartment houses on the steep of the Avenue Gambetta. The real Dieppe came too in many motors from Normand *châteaux*, from Cabourg, Étretat, Deauville, from all the little places on the coast; the husbands arrived, and the men from Rouen with their ready-made ties and their wives with the Rouen hats. The English increased in numbers, and they were a new kind of English; they did not belong

to the boy-and-girl section which turns Dieppe into a St. Andrews-cum-Queen's Club, nor to the *élite* which fastidiously clusters round the English actress who is so French that her bodices meet down the back. The new English had neither the taste for picnics and flirting of the former, nor the discriminating appetite of the latter who haunt the little restaurant opposite the Saint-Saens museum : they had come for the races, and they looked it. The men had an air of soap and hard short hair, fresh cheeks, loud clothes; they met in the baccarat-room and sniffed at the maximum; they clustered at the Casino buffet and pretended it was a bar. They made no rushes for the *Daily Telegraph* at four o'clock, but the post brought them pink or orange sheets. As for their women, they were smart in the coat and skirt style, smoked, and drank cocktails. Sportsmen all. There were Americans too, Paris Americans, not the American boy with the padded shoulders and the square-toed shoes and the Gibson girl, but the Paris Americans with the big motors, the Homburgs and the English accent.

And Dieppe was ready for them all. The theatre ran three plays and starred Réjane (which annoyed the English actress, as it would make London say that they were more and more alike); relays of croupiers were imported from Forges-les-Eaux and Étretat; as for the orchestra, it played *Jubel* every night because the overture introduces "God Save the King." And everybody came. Madame Sarlat-Cohen came from Trouville, on her way to Contréxeville, where Mézin was taking the waters; Madame Chavel came in the Castelac motor with the lovely Pauline and her conqueror-conquest; the Samaros came and settled in a third-floor back in the Rue de

Syggogne, while Pervenche returned from Brighton. It was to be his one appearance in France during the summer; after Dieppe he was going to Scheveningen for a week or so before seeking out the sun at San Sebastian.

The Duvernoys were on the course the second day. There had been some talk of hiring a fly.

"I think it ridiculous," said Madame Duvernoy, "it'll cost twenty francs, and twenty francs more for each of us to get into the members' enclosure."

"We only go once a year," said her husband indulgently.

"No reason for wasting money."

"Perhaps we'll win at the *pari mutuel*," Henri suggested.

"Very likely," sneered his father, "I suppose you'll put your money on Suzette."

Henri flushed angrily, but could say nothing. Suzette was certainly a hot favourite for the Prix des Étrangers. At last Madame Duvernoy won. They came in the train, first class, for it looked better. Once through the long avenue which leads to the course from Rouxmesnil they were among friends. They met Javal and the Marzelles and walked with them to the entrance; the dark youth was still flirting with the fat Madame Marzelle, while her husband wagged his black beard and talked to Monsieur Duvernoy of the great things that might be done with the little river if only it were dredged, provided with boat-houses and boats.

"Why," he said at length, "it might be turned into a regular Bougival. Swings, you know, and switch-backs and plenty of coloured lights after dark."

Madame Marzelle laughed her smothered laugh,

and Javal brushed her shoulder unseen and unrebuked. The party separated at the entrance, for the Marzelles and Javal were bound for the cheaper middle ring. Once on the course, Henri had a moment of pure pleasure. The sun showered torrid heat over the short grass; the shapely and glistening horses ambled slowly round the paddock, muffled up in blankets and led by brisk English lads, while here and there the *casaque* of a jockey made a bright spot of colour. All round him, too, was a gay throng of women in trim racing clothes, fawn linen and black-and-white checks, women delightfully mannish with their race-glasses and cards, and yet very French when you looked into their eyes. Besides, they had not quite the figures (or the absence of figures) required by their clothes. The barbarian English, who mostly refused to take the races seriously, wore tweed coats and flannel trousers, while their women in some cases dared to dangle their hats in their hands.

"One might think," said Madame Samaro, "that they were on the beach."

For the Samaros had arrived all three, by favour of free passes granted to "foreign diplomats" who are also company directors.

"You are right, Madame," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "these English are not civilised. They do what they like, they go to the opera in knickerbockers, and when they travel . . .! Have I ever told you what happened to me in a railway carriage at Lille?"

Monsieur Duvernoy began his lengthy story about the Englishman's pipe.

" . . . *Non, Monsieur,*" I said, 'you have a pipe . . .'

Henri turned to Dolorès and Mercedes, both magnificent and overpowering in white. They rolled over him their immense eyes.

"What are you backing, Monsieur Duvernoy?" asked Dolorès.

"Give me a tip, will you? I shan't tell," said Mercedes.

"Oh, I'm no racing man," replied Henri. "Still," he added unguardedly, "I hear that Suzette . . ."

Dolorès winked at Mercedes and both exploded. The young man was much embarrassed on realising his stupidity, while Madame Samaro threw him an inquiring glance; she felt sure he was being disrespectful to her daughters. But Monsieur Duvernoy paralysed her with his —

" . . . *Non, Monsieur,*" I said, 'you have a pipe . . .'

Madame Duvernoy began to praise Mercedes' frock, upon which Dolorès hurled herself upon her opportunity.

"I say," she murmured, casting languid looks over Henri, "tell me, Monsieur Duvernoy, is it true about Suzanne Bernay? . . . Ah, ah, it is true, you are blushing."

"I'm not blushing," said Henri angrily.

"Then you've had a sunstroke." The big dark girl laughed again. "There, don't be angry. Everybody's talking about it. They say Madame Bernay's quite willing, and that . . . that . . ."

"That my mother isn't. It's true, she isn't."

"Ah," sighed Dolorès, "how *triste* that is. But persevere, patience and shuffle the cards, as we say in Spanish. She is very pretty, I congratulate you."

"You are very kind," said Henri genuinely, drawing nearer.

"I wish I were in love," sighed Dolorès. "I suppose I'll have to wait until I'm married."

Henri looked at her sympathetically. She was not bad-looking, this Dolorès, in her fierce South American way; she had a coarse skin, but good eyes and thick black hair. They were quite close now, and, as he moved, his hand touched the girl's bare, strong forearm. He was warmed by her sympathy and hardly realised that she did not move her arm away. But Madame Samaro felt rather than saw the danger. She broke away from Monsieur Duvernoy, who was now beginning his story over again—

"'. . . *Non, Monsieur,*' I said, 'you have a pipe . . .'"

She broke the group up by congratulating Henri on his taste in ties, then turned to speak to the Chavels, who came up followed by the negligent de Castelac and the impeccable Pervenche. The latter was immaculately turned out, straight from Sackville Street, complete with his English Homburg, spats and dogskin gloves. The clothes suited him, as evening clothes suited him, as did golf clothes and yachting suits. He was the kind of man who could look distinguished in a wet bathing suit.

"*Allons, Castelac, mon ami,*" said Madame Chavel, "go and put a hundred francs for me on Tapette. She's my fancy."

"It's a he," said Castelac, laughing.

"Never mind, how can one tell from a horse's name? Back him for a place. What are you laughing at, Mademoiselle Samaro?"

"Nothing." Dolorès was choking, and turned to Pervenche for help. But Petronius took no notice of her. He was gravely examining the lovely Pauline, who cast fearful eyes at him.

"Well?" she said at length, breathing hard.

"Not bad, not bad," muttered Pervenche at last. "A little long between shoulder and waist."

"Oh," cried Mercedès, "you can't find fault with Doucet."

"I can find fault anywhere when I'm asked to criticise clothes," said Pervenche.

"But I assure you it's not too long," cried Pauline. "*Maman*, he says it's too long between shoulder and waist."

"Well, Monsieur Pervenche knows," said Madame Chavel.

"It isn't too long," cried Dolorès, joining the group.

"Yes, it is," said Madame Duvernoy, irresistibly drawn to them.

Pervenche was surrounded by the women, all screaming together. Pauline was twirled round, pushed. She was nearly weeping when Pervenche at last found a pin and, deftly inserting a tuck under the arm, removed the fold.

"There," he said, "now you are perfect. Show that to Doucet."

Henri and Monsieur Duvernoy were left out, for all the women still clustered round Pervenche, who was now talking for them.

"Yes," he said, "it's a gift. An art. I'm prouder of it than if I had a title."

"Oh, we don't think so much of titles," said Madame Chavel airily.

"I know, *chère Madame*, nor do certain people. Which reminds me of the latest. I heard it the other day at the club, at Brighton. It appears that Jacques d'Ervin, the playwright, you know (his real name is Pochon), wrote to Vallier, the manager, asking

whether he might call and read his new play. Vallier, who's a good friend whom I adore, wrote back saying, 'Yes, come Tuesday.' But that didn't suit that little snob of a Pochon . . . d'Ervin, I mean . . ."

"Ah, ah," cried Dolorès, "you are cruel."

"So he answered: '*Mon cher Vallier*,—Can't do it next week. On Tuesday I lunch with the Comtesse de Miramar, Wednesday with the Marquise de St. Rémy, Thursday I am going to the Duc de Gueret's hunt, Friday to the Prince Jérôme's, and Saturday, probably, to pass the day with the Shah of Persia. What about the week after?'"

"Ah, ah." There was a burst of laughter.

"He is a fine snob, your d'Ervin."

"Pochon, *chère Madame*, Pochon. But Vallier won. Hewroteback: '*Mon cher d'Ervin*,—Impossible the week after. On Monday I lunch with my boot-maker, Tuesday my butcher lunches with me; on Wednesday I go to an "at home" given by the croupier of my club, on Thursday I go cycling with the chiropodist, while Friday is no good as I am booked to go and play with the barber's baby, and Saturday no good either, for I'm going to Saint Cloud to your butler's wedding."

The triumph of Pervenche was complete. Madame Duvernoy laughed, while Pauline's fine stupid eyes opened in wonder, and the Samaro women convulsively giggled. Henri had not heard the end, for his eyes were fixed on a party of three. It was the Bernay family, Monsieur Bernay tired and bitter-looking, Madame Bernay tired and smiling, Suzanne deliciously flushed. She raised her black lashes and looked at him with a pitiful little smile which made him want to snatch her up and bolt. But he was no

hero. The Bernays were quite near. Madame Bernay smiled in response to his bow; at once Madame Duvernoy turned, and then her husband followed the direction of her eyes. The two families remained face to face, for Pervenche was occupying the rest of the party. The six felt between them the complex atmosphere of self-interest which acts as a link and as a barrier. As they stood stupidly smiling with muscles schooled by habit, they desperately searched their brains for something to say. They were all conscious of big issues: Madame Duvernoy of her protective passion, Madame Bernay of her desire for Suzanne's happiness, the young people of each other. The men were less awkward, for the sight of one another mainly brought up their business relations, but they were hampered by the strife that reigned between their wives. If they had been alone they would have spoken easily. The women looked at one another, opened and then shut their mouths; it meant an effort for them to avoid vital issues. They felt it almost impossible to talk of the heat or the horses; an awful impulse was on them to rush publicly into debate, to clamour for the happiness or the peace of their children. They were removed from the atmosphere of pleasure that surrounded them, isolated, as it were, by the fierceness of their passions. At last Madame Bernay pulled herself together.

"What a surprise!" she faltered. "I did not know you were still at Dieppe. *Enchantée.*"

"No more did I, *chère Madame,*" said Madame Duvernoy. "The world is very small."

There was a pause.

"Well, how are you, Duvernoy?" asked Bernay.

"Very well, thanks. Very hot, isn't it?"

"Ah, yes, very hot," said Madame Bernay, "we suffer dreadfully at Pourville. Suzanne can hardly sleep, *n'est-ce pas*, Suzanne?"

"*Oui, maman.*"

The tension relaxed. The groups mixed; the Samaro women came in and trampled down the barrier. Soon all were talking of the things civilised people talk of, the weather, the favourites, their luck at cards. Pervenche's voice was heard—

"That young man, there?"

"Yes," said Dolorès, "look at his plastered yellow hair, he must be English."

"He?" said Pervenche, "oh no, he looks much too English to be an Englishman; he must be a German."

Then Monsieur Duvernoy coughed, cleared his throat, threw a glance at his wife. He spoke in a low but clear voice, the railway-case voice.

"Oh, I say, Bernay," he remarked, as if casually, "we shall be so glad if you will all three come and dine with us next week. Choose your day."

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

VINGT-CINQ ANS

I

THE heavy December drizzle had swallowed up the Eiffel Tower. From the dining-room window all that could be seen was the iron-grey sky where no sun shimmered behind the pall of falling rain. Below, in the municipal yard, a dismal wind blew through the bare branches of the chestnut tree, while in every corner of the courtyard the water could be heard falling with a curious metallic clatter from the rain-pipes and the zinc roofs. But there was in the dining-room a gaiety and an atmosphere of excitement, fostered by the tumbling and laughter of the eight people who were gathered there. The room was small, but its size encouraged merriment as do all propinquities when they do not encourage quarrels. Already the table was laid for nine, and there was about its appointments a feeling of the unusual; the silver had been cleaned; some money had been spent on a small bowl of orchids; some money had bought hot-house grapes.

And there was festiveness even in Mademoiselle Ravier, as she walked round the room peering with her short-sighted eyes at the silver teapot outlined behind the muslin curtains of the sideboard, at the

marble-topped dumb waiter, even at the tall brown stove in which an economical fire struggled for its life.

"*Charmant, charmant*," she repeated vaguely, as she passed every object in review with the sickening approval of the sycophant. "Marthe, you have so much taste."

"Oh no, *ma tante*, everything's very simple," said Madame Duvernoy jovially.

"And your flowers!" pursued the relentlessly admiring Mademoiselle Ravier, "how lovely!"

"Lovely," echoed the poor ghost of a Lacour spinster, as she followed round the room the head of the house.

"Lovely," said the other Lacour girl. Her voice was the same as that of her sister, her smile the same, as were her tightly drawn strands of hair and faded clothes. Those two, as well as Mademoiselle Ravier, wore the livery of dependence.

"I hope Henri'll be pleased," muttered Madame Duvernoy.

"He must be *difficile* if he isn't," said Monsieur Lacour with a laugh. He was Madame Duvernoy's younger brother, an Algerian grower of alfalfa, in Paris for a holiday with Jacques, his son, and his little girl Julie. His bronzed thin face and gay blue eyes seemed to caress that which they touched. But there was decision and some coldness in his thin lips, hardness in his square chin. Henri had not thrown back to this particular uncle. "*Voyons*, Jacques," he added, "leave your sister alone."

"I'm not hurting her, *papa*," said the boy, as he pushed the little girl into a corner. Julie was laughing. Jacques opened the door of a cupboard.

"I'm going to put you in it," he said.

There was a struggle between the black-a-vised boy and his excitable swarthy little sister. She was rescued only when half in the cupboard and emerged flushed and almost crying from between piles of Henri's old school books.

"Jacques," said Monsieur Duvernoy severely, "if you crumple your sister's frock I'll stop your grapes."

"Or send you back to the *lycée*," threatened Monsieur Lacour.

"No you won't, *papa*," said the boy impudently, "they've got scarlet fever there."

Everybody laughed, the men and Madame Duvernoy boldly, Mademoiselle Ravier in a faint ingratiating cackle. The Lacour phantoms allowed smiles to dawn on their pale lips.

"They do get precocious in Algiers," said Monsieur Duvernoy.

"They do," said his brother-in-law; "it's the sun, you know. We'll have Jacques marrying at seventeen."

"And Julie at twelve," said Jacques.

"Keep quiet, Jacques," said Madame Duvernoy angrily.

The ambient excitement seemed to increase; the two men talked of business and colonial expansion, the children romped; the poor relations followed Madame Duvernoy round the table and got in the way of Charlotte, who wanted to give it some unnecessary finishing touches. Then the door opened and Henri entered the room.

"*Ah, le voilà.*"

"*Bonjour Henri*, a happy birthday!"

"Cousin Henri, Cousin Henri!" cried the little

girl, running up to him. Henri blushed and stammered as the children boldly tugged at his hands. His father smiled; Madame Duvernoy put her arms round his neck and kissed him on both cheeks. He looked handsome in his embarrassment, rosy, blue-eyed. He could not answer the compliments of Monsieur Lacour, the children's questions, avoid the shy and dutiful embraces of the Lacour spinsters.

The wishing of Henri's birthday had become among the Duvernoys a recognised breach of French usages. In older and better days, when no Republic dominated the country, St. Henri's Day would duly have been commemorated by a dinner on St. Henri's Eve; but St. Henri's Eve falls on the fatal fourteenth of July when the *canaille* rejoices over the downfall of the royal house. Thus Monsieur Duvernoy, who could look upon the great day only as a day of mourning, had decreed in '81 that the feast should be shifted to the anniversary of his son's birth: he gladly sacrificed the boy's patron saint to his political convictions. On this particular birthday custom had been further disregarded and the regulation dinner replaced by a lunch, for Lacour's business engagements would have made impossible his presence in the evening: to miss a relative avoidably would have been a calamity. The untraditional party was merry enough, so much so that it was difficult to restore order.

"Silence!" cried Monsieur Duvernoy in his best law-court style. "We must get to business. Henri, you begin your twenty-sixth year well, breakfast in bed and up at eleven."

"Lazy," said the greatly daring Mademoiselle Ravier.

"You are right, *ma tante*," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "still, we will forgive him. Shut the door, Marie; I feel a draught."

Old Marie shut the door and stood against it, beaming upon her beloved Henri as he hesitated in the middle of the room. By her side stood Charlotte, broadly smiling, and Eugénie, rather flushed and wiping her hands on her blue apron.

"Henri," said Monsieur Duvernoy gravely, "we are here to wish you a happy birthday. This is the twenty-fifth anniversary of your birth, and I . . . we all hope your future career, your health and your happiness will be as good and . . . er . . . better than ever they have been . . . and I want you to accept from me a small present. As I did not know what to buy I have left it to you."

"*Merci bien, papa*," said Henri, as he took the envelope from his father.

"You do the thing well," said Monsieur Lacour to his brother-in-law, as he saw the young man hold up three hundred-franc notes.

"Oh, it's nothing," said Monsieur Duvernoy, with a moved self-conscious laugh. He felt awkward and happy as his big son kissed him on both cheeks. "Now," he said, "your turn, Jacques."

The dark boy stepped forward, looking very nigger-like in the black-and-gold uniform of the Algiers *lycée*. He cast bold eyes round the room before beginning.

"Cousin Henri," he said, with the calmness of one who is used to the glare of publicity, "I have much joy in wishing you happy and prosperous years. I have not known you very long, but still enough to esteem and respect you, to know that the reputation

of our family is safe in your hands. Thus it is my pleasure as well as my duty to present you with this gun-metal cigarette-case, as a token of our regard and [the orator nearly broke down] it is *très anglais*."

"Bravo!" cried Monsieur Duvernoy. "We must make this boy a barrister. He speaks better than I do."

"And more," said Monsieur Lacour. "Still, Jacques, that is well spoken."

Henri took the gun-metal case, kissing his young cousin as he so did.

Now the little girl was pushed forward too; she stood for some seconds, shifting her feet, her serious dark eyes fixed on the carpet.

"Now, Julie, don't be timid," said Madame Duvernoy, smiling.

"I'm not timid," said the child, "I'm waiting for you to stop talking."

There was laughter, a cry of "*Vas-y-donc, eh! Polaire*," from Monsieur Lacour; but not until silence was established did Julie lift from the floor her deliberate gaze. Then she began in even tones the traditional *compliment*—

À MON COUSIN

Je vous souhaite, mon cousin,
En vous offrant ces pauvres fleurs,
Un heureux et joyeux destin,
Santé, richesse et long bonheur.
Je souhaite que le Bon Dieu
Vous donne des rêves charmants,
Vous fasse vivre fort et vieux :
Tel est, cousin, mon compliment.

As the "bravos" of the assembly burst forth Henri bent down to kiss the dark child, but the womanly little girl pushed him back with a small hand.

"*Un instant*," she said, "*les fleurs*." She presented him with the bouquet, and then only put her hand on his shoulder and kissed his cheek. Henri felt absurdly moved by the stereotyped doggerel she had recited; he guessed that it was extracted from one of the little penny books where short recitations for every occasion and every relationship are to be found ready made, but still the atmosphere of it affected his simple soul. As he kissed the calm precocious child he was conscious all through him that family life, the simplicity and the innocence it stood for, were the things he so badly wanted. And he thought of another, a lovelier face, of little faces like that other one.

But already the household had reasserted itself. Eugénie, hot and flushed with excitement, handed him a tobacco pouch, an unfortunate selection as he did not make his own cigarettes. He acknowledged it with a hearty handshake, as also a breakfast cup and saucer, gorgeous red-and-white articles with "HENRI" boldly painted on both, from black-eyed Charlotte. Old Marie nearly wept as, after accepting embroidered slippers, he kissed her on both cheeks. Mademoiselle Ravier presented him with an appalling red-and-grey knitted comforter, made by her own hands; the Lacour spinsters burdened him with a water-colour (probably a landscape), painted by the elder and framed by the younger in magenta velvet. He was kissed, and the atmosphere of this faded femininity disturbed while it pleased him. They kissed him shyly and yet with the intensity of those to whom kisses come seldom. At last he freed himself, laughing, ruffled and blushing; he felt gay and warmed by all this affection and this kindness which enveloped

him. Then his eyes met those of his mother, and he realised that he had forgotten her; her gaze was inquisitive and piteous, also compelling, as if she were demanding his attention. His mood changed, and he stood before her suddenly cold.

"Henri," said Madame Duvernoy in even tones, "surely there is nothing I can wish you to-day, for you know that I . . . that I always wish everything that will make you happy. . . ." [Their thoughts flew together towards the same goal.] "I . . . I wish you everything in the world, Henri, that you may be healthy and strong, and that you may never know a day of sorrow . . ." [Oh, could she go on and see those eyes?] . . . "that you may succeed in what you attempt and that . . . that all your desire . . ." [No, no, not all, not all!] . . . "that you may be happy . . . happy."

And then Madame Duvernoy burst into tears, thus creating among the assembled relatives the impression that she had a sensitive nature. Henri took her in his arms, melted too, while she thrust into his hand a small parcel which he could feel through the flimsy paper to be a watch and chain. She pressed her face against the tweed of his coat, still weeping; Henri's eyes were wet, too, as he bent down and whispered—

"*Maman*, can't you give me . . . ?"

She alone heard the end of the sentence, and again surprised the relatives by suddenly releasing herself and facing her son with a tight mouth and flaming cheeks.

"*Ah, les femmes*," innocent Monsieur Lacour summed up, all nerves, all nerves.

II

"Jules," said Madame Duvernoy suddenly, "are you asleep?"

"No, I thought you were."

"I can't sleep. I'm suffering."

"What's the matter—stomach-ache?"

"Don't be silly, Jules," said Madame Duvernoy angrily, as she raised herself up in bed on one elbow; "I'm thinking of Henri."

"What's the matter with him? He seems cheerful enough."

"Cheerful! One can see you're only a man; you don't understand; you don't see he's still thinking about that girl."

"Well, that's no news," said Monsieur Duvernoy in an acid tone, "I know that as well as you do. You haven't discovered America, my dear Marthe."

"I'm talking about Henri. You don't know what he said to me to-day when I gave him that watch and chain."

"Oh! what did he say?" Monsieur Duvernoy was interested and turned towards his wife, whom he could not see.

"He said, '*Maman*, can't you give me the present I want most in the world, your consent to my marriage?'"

There was silence for a moment while Monsieur Duvernoy considered the situation. Then he spoke—

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything, I was too angry."

"Hum, yes. Well, I suppose you couldn't say anything."

"Jules, what do you mean? Do you suggest that we should consent?" Monsieur Duvernoy did not reply until his wife had repeated her question.

"No," he said at length, "I don't say that. Still, if he's set on it, if he's made up his mind . . ."

"How can you talk like that, Jules? You know this Bernay is a scoundrel. If the girl had some money, I don't say . . . but she hasn't. It's abominable. I won't have my son sacrificed. I won't have him thrown away on a girl with no *dot* whom nobody will have. I won't have it. I can't bear it. It's cruel of you to turn against me. It's not fair, it's not loyal, it's . . ."

"Now, Marthe, what have I said? I haven't said you should consent."

"You suggested it."

"I didn't. Still, if the boy is bent on it . . . it would make things easier with Bernay; you see, his case isn't finished by a long way, and it won't be for at least a year now the Government's in it."

"You're not going to sacrifice Henri to that case."

"Oh, don't be absurd."

"I won't have him sacrificed. He's my boy. I've brought him up . . . I've made him what he is . . . I'm entitled to his obedience. . . ."

Madame Duvernoy sat up and feverishly smoothed her face with her hot hands. Her breath came so quickly that she felt suffocated as she fought and clamoured for this son of hers. She was going to believe in her absolute rights if she had to shout until she drowned opposing voices.

"Oh, do be sensible!"

"Sensible!" Madame cast a look of scorn towards the spot where her husband lay invisible. Sensible

indeed ! sensible when she was struggling for a thing as precious as her own life. At that moment she hated and despised her husband. She had no sympathy with the masculine temperament ; she could not grasp that its function was to construct, to compromise with difficulties and to sacrifice principles so that it might go on, build, make money, reputation by which the race would benefit ; she only saw egoism and indifference where there is the blind natural force which creates in the male an illusion of egoism so that he may serve an altruistic purpose. She thought that her husband ought to be like her, hard, mulish, so that he could maintain ; she was there to protect young life, he to attack the world on its behalf ; but she would have had him enlist under the woman's colours, stand by her side and hold the fort.

"Sensible," she again snarled.

"Yes, sensible ; you can't always do what you like with a son . . . in some cases you must give way a little . . . make allowances . . . especially when you must."

"Must ? "

"Yes . . . what would you do if Henri defied you ? "

"Oh . . . he wouldn't."

"He might."

"I'd never consent."

"Well, you know, there is a new fact in the situation."

"A new fact ? " said Madame Duvernoy in a low, intense voice.

"Yes, he's twenty-five now. The law now allows him to do without our consent. He can go to any *huissier* and call upon us to give way, and . . . if

we don't . . . well, you know that as well as I do . . . he can do without our leave."

The old couple did not speak for some moments. Madame Duvernoy laid her head on the pillow as if knocked down by an unexpected blow. Yes, of course she knew the law; she knew that up to the age of twenty-five a son could not marry without his parents' consent, that on his twenty-fifth birthday he could dispense with their approval by serving upon them the equivalent of a summons. A summons! She had a horrid vision of the scrubby *huissier* in dingy black who would mumble at her the formula by which Henri signified that he flouted her authority. She saw the man's shaven face and dirty whiskers, heard the dreary monotone of his voice as he gabbled his message, anxious to be done with it and breaking her heart.

"He wouldn't do it," she said at length.

"You can't tell," said her husband. "He may. And then you'll have to give way to threats instead of to prayers."

"I won't give in," said the mother, with a sudden rush of energy. "I won't. I won't. If he does that . . . I'll never see him again."

"One minute," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "remember it's for me, not for you, to say yes or no."

A new terror had crept into the mother's life. She might now be attacked by her own husband.

"You won't do it, you won't do it," she screamed, as she clutched him by the arm.

"Gently, gently," said her husband, pulling his arm away. He was a little frightened. "Of course, Marthe, of course . . . I always consult you, I won't consent until you do."

She felt a little safer. Still, she wanted to secure her victory. Far into the night they talked, weighing chances and policies. They planned to draw a veil over the past, to maintain business relations, for the railway case must not be lost, while reducing social intercourse with the Bernays to a minimum. And a nice girl with money must be found for Henri; then it would be all right. There was nothing else to be done; an hour after a slight but regular snore informed Madame Duvernoy that her husband had gone to sleep, she found herself whispering, "I won't consent, I won't, I won't! Never!"

But, next morning, when she woke up, she was frightened by the acid taste that filled her mouth, by her red and swollen eyes. She had wept.

PART III

CHAPTER THE FIRST

TROIS ANS APRÈS

I

HENRI was getting fat. The enemy of the French youth is not the wrinkle, nor even the deadly pouch under the eye; it is not the falling hair, it is fat. He was rosy as ever, still blue-eyed, but a terrible, if slight, rotundity had begun to invade his waistcoat, to spoil the fine lines of his wrists. Beyond this and the manlier wealth of his red moustache there was no great change in him. For three years he had feebly warred with his parents, had begged for mercy, wept, at rare intervals stormed and almost threatened, but it was characteristic of him that he had done nothing. He had stagnated, he had maintained desires instead of developing ambitions; he had continued to want Suzanne without formulating any plan culminating in capture. Though the three years had superbly proved the faithfulness of his soul, they had also proved its weakness. His intentions were as water running through his feeble hands.

Events had no doubt been against him. One year after Henri's twenty-fifth birthday Madame Bernay had despaired of the match; she knew Madame Duvernoy, and realised that she was not likely to be

beaten by her lovable but weak son. She half sympathised with her too; not that Suzanne's loveliness, exaggerated as it was by the maternal eye, did not weigh heavily in the balance, but she had been poor and she was of her nation. Thus she found Madame Duvernoy's attitude was understandable; she might in like case have herself taken it up. As soon as she realised this she took action, for it would not do to allow Suzanne, then twenty-one, to fritter away her chances, for twenty-one is in France none too young. Besides, the coupling of Suzanne's name with that of Henri was patent though irregular, and drove away possible suitors. With a heavy heart Madame Bernay accepted the national gospel. She did the impossible to avoid the necessity; she asked her husband whether he could not by a supreme effort muster even a hundred and fifty thousand francs, and it hurt her to do so when she saw his careworn face grow tenser. He could not do it; even fifty thousand francs would be a struggle, and he dared not reduce their establishment, for any weakness would ruin his uncertain credit and bring him down to the ground. So Suzanne wept and wore costlier gowns; and Madame Bernay suffered agony as she forced her to dismiss her lover while she ostentatiously bought from Tiffany the emerald the Princess Volochine had described as "too dear for me." Monsieur Bernay remained faithful to Loulou Lamirale: she was part of his advertising policy.

Suzanne wept, but Suzanne obeyed. She did not entirely obey; she told Henri that they could not marry, and that he must give her up; but she added that she would never marry any one else. Half-a-dozen letters passed between the *étude* Berquin and

Jeanne Bréguet before the parting was completed, letters full of tears (real staining tears), but letters which forged between them more truly than ardent protestations an eternal bond. These two were as puppets in the hands of their fighting mothers, feeling more than they thought, and unable to gather enough mental energy to live up to the storm of their sentiments. They were soft and they were helpless, too, in presence of the traditional law of French society, of which the mother is the queen—the queen in fact as well as in name when the talk is of gold and matings. They had no supporters; the fathers were too busy or too convinced that their wives knew best; the families were either hostile or quiescent; friends shrugged their shoulders and said that “love was all very well, but still one had to be reasonable.” The most powerful of all foes, however, was not material: it was the weight of French tradition which elevates the family and its financial organisation above God and the State, even among those French folk who believe in God. The tradition was their tradition, a thing which had but to breathe on their fine desires to sully them, for they had been brought up within its shadow. And in the shadow they were cold.

The end of the railway case came soon after the breaking of the unofficial engagement. It had put a good deal of money into Monsieur Duvernoy's pocket while it left Bernay where he was. He had often hoped to draw from the concession enough to give Suzanne her heart's desire, to gain ease at last; but his case was bad, and, had it not been for his own cleverness, he would have been a loser instead of maintaining his position. After two years of pleadings and appeals the French Government had

suddenly intervened, removed the case from the legal to the diplomatic field and summarily settled it by causing the concession to be cancelled, while refunding the Bernay Syndicate its expenses. The case had become a political danger, and, as the Government still had its hands full of the school and church difficulties it had inherited from its predecessor, the foreign field had to be cleared. Bernay said very loudly on the Bourse that he was well rid of the *sale affaire*, and was to some extent a gainer by the transaction, as he was able to gull some officials and bribe the others when returning his expenses. Still, this did not amount to much.

The ending of the railway case, however, deeply affected the affairs of the lovers. So long as it lasted the connection between the families was maintained, for it meant fees for Monsieur Duvernoy; moreover Bernay could not get rid of his barrister, as the case had become so complicated that no new man could have taken up the threads. Thus an occasional dinner had to be given, dinners which were made as large and as formal as possible, but still heaven-born opportunities for the lovers to shake hands and to look into each other's eyes. The dropping of the case automatically broke the link: Madame Duvernoy no longer attended Madame Bernay's crushes, while Madame Bernay nevermore appeared on Madame Duvernoy's Wednesdays. The lovers met once in five months, at an accidental dance. The parents congratulated themselves upon the ending of a bad business.

When Henri was twenty-seven an attempt was made to marry him to a suitable young girl. She was pretty, elegant, viewed him with no repulsion, and

had a *dot* of three hundred thousand francs. But Henri refused.

"What have you got against her?" clamoured Madame Duvernoy. "She's pretty, her parents are *très bien*, she's musical, speaks English."

"I'm not in love with her," said Henri sulkily.

"Oh, don't be ridiculous. You'll be very happy together; she is *charmante*."

"I agree she is *charmante*, but I won't marry her."

Madame Duvernoy found it impossible to move him. Though she could curb his desires she could not vanquish his obstinacy, and with this half-triumph she had to be content. She dared not then ask the reason for his refusal.

Thus there was a complete deadlock. The families had drifted apart; the lovers, while showing no signs of rebellion, had resolutely settled down to the only course they were capable of adopting resolutely, namely, refusing to move. They had fatally drifted together again through the medium of their letters; then, and more usefully, through Madame Javal. This was Letitia, who had by sheer magnificence of physique and of mental strength conquered the weakly youth who had boasted of her downfall. He pleased the strong girl, this little dark man with the small hands and the weak stomach; she had tempestuously married him on his two hundred and fifty francs a month, made the arrangements for the wedding, selected their evil little flat on the fifth-floor back in the Rue Montenotte, bought the furniture; she had significantly called for Javal on the morning of the wedding, on foot, followed by her meek mother, and energetically marched him to the *mairie*. Now she was successfully running him by means of judicious

calls on the wives of his superiors. There was no knowing where Letitia would drive him. The marriage had astonished Henri, for it was against French *bourgeois* canons that Javal should marry Letitia if it was true that she had not been *farouche*. Either Javal had lied, or he had been singularly chivalrous, and neither seemed very likely. Henri ended by dismissing the matter from his mind as an over-difficult problem. It never struck him that Javal might have told the truth, and yet that Letitia might have been strong enough to compel him to marry the woman he would consider disgraced because she had yielded to him. Such a conception of a woman's strength could not occur to a weak man.

Letitia Javal was the mainstay of the lovers. Suzanne was allowed to go out under her chaperonage and was by her incited to break the rules of the game. Time was found on Sunday afternoons for meetings in the cheap *salon* in the Rue Montenotte; but, sweet as they were made by the holding of hands and even by shy kisses, they always took place under the vigilant eye of Letitia, whose ideas of propriety were shadowy, but whose views of the advisable were definite. She never left the lovers, rallied them on their want of spirit, but saw to it that their transgressions should not go far. They were happy thus in their feebleness, in their mollusc-like tendency to remain where they were. If Letitia had not been a woman, therefore a creature for whom sex is everything, her strong soul would never have tolerated their formless purposes.

But events were hurrying on. Suzanne was twenty-three, and had not once been sought in marriage. An attempt made by Monsieur Bernay had only resulted

in the apparition of a Jewish *remisier* whom Madame Bernay had refused to consider.

"Well," her husband had snapped, "what do you expect for fifty thousand francs?"

She had shrugged her shoulders, as if full of disdain, but her heart was very sore when she looked at Suzanne's dark eyes, her parted red lips, and wondered whether all this grace must wither like a flower that becometh not fruit. When the inevitable shock of discovery had come and she heard that her daughter was meeting Henri at the Javals' she was at heart relieved: it was a desperate affair, and it ruined the girl's chances, but while the young couple loved there was hope. Still, she had to speak severely to Letitia.

"I don't see what you're complaining about," said Letitia brutally; "nobody wants her. You can't buy her a man."

Madame Bernay winced. "I beg you, Letitia, don't speak like that. Poor girls marry as well as rich. You, for instance."

"I? Yes, I saw my man and I took him. I believe in force, and took him by force. You may say he isn't much. . . ."

"Oh . . . I didn't . . ."

"No, you thought. You're right, I'm not offended. But I'm going to make something of him by knocking down the others. Now Suzanne is different, she has no courage to act with, but she'll stand a lot, and if she sticks to Henri and he to her they'll win."

"But will they?" asked Madame Bernay. "If they do hold together for two or three years more and still refuse to give in Suzanne will never marry."

"Well, she needn't. She doesn't deserve to be

happy if she can't fight. But don't worry : Suzanne is a worm and Henri an imbecile ; those people always stick because they daren't move. I've preached revolt to Henri ten times, told him to marry Suzanne on two hundred and fifty francs a month (he's had a rise), as I did . . ."

"Oh, I couldn't allow that," said Madame Bernay.

"You could if you had to," said Letitia savagely.

"I didn't ask my mother for leave."

Madame Bernay had sighed helplessly. This strong woman, her obstinate daughter, her busy husband and his embarrassments, the lack of suitors, all this was too much for her. So she said no more, and, with the others, went adrift.

II

There are crises in courtships as there are in storms. They come, and often end without damaging anything, but still the sea has been lashed until it showed that it could destroy if a ship were driven out of her course by the gale. A crisis such as this occurred when Henri was twenty-eight and another attempt was made to expel by a suitable marriage the disturbing past. The selection of the girl was made with very great care ; she was everything that was desirable, and, besides, everything that the earlier aspirant had been : here Madame Duvernoy showed that she understood the masculine heart, for the girl was tall, slim and dark. The mother traded a little on the tendency of men to love a type rather than a woman ; she knew instinctively that men have blind preferences for certain combinations of form and

manner, and that they generally fall under their sway whenever they are confronted with them. There was hope too, for Henri had openly admired Madeleine Arnaud, and this encouraged Madame Duvernoy to take the necessary steps with the Arnaud family. The Arnauds were quite agreeable; they thought that Henri was a nice young man, hardly likely to be notoriously unfaithful to his wife (a little would not matter); the fortunes were both fair. As for that unfortunate affair with Suzanne, Madame Duvernoy assured them that this was all over, mere calf-love. Thus armed she decided to attack Henri.

"What do you think of Madeleine Arnaud?" she asked suddenly, as her son sat near the dining-room window, looking out vacuously over the black roofs into the pale winter sky.

"Madeleine Arnaud? Oh, she's a nice girl. Pretty, too, very pretty."

Madame Duvernoy watched him from under her brows.

"Yes," she said, "very pretty. They say she's had five offers, and yet she's only twenty-one."

"Oh?" Henri's tone was not that of a jealous admirer.

"And no wonder. It's not only that she's what she is, tall, slim, dark, so elegant too; she's got a good *dot*, two hundred and fifty thousand francs and expectations. Not that that's everything."

"No?" There was a suspicion of a raised eyebrow the mother did not like.

"No, not everything. Still, it's very nice, very necessary. Besides, she's *bien élevée*, intelligent, oh, very intelligent; she's musical, *très artiste* they say, and . . . musical."

"Oh yes, I'm sure she's very nice." Henry spoke airily; he remembered that another girl had been described to him like this, and it had prefaced a suggestion that he should marry her.

"She's charming," Madame Duvernoy resumed, "she speaks English."

Then Henri knew that he was being proposed to, and shifted in his chair as if he were about to get up and leave the room. His mother realised his embarrassment, and at once attacked him.

"Have you thought about her at all?" she asked.

"Thought about her? No, of course not. I've danced with her two or three times; we've played tennis once; there's nothing to think about."

"Oh, don't be absurd, Henri, you know what I mean. Have you ever thought she'd be a charming wife?"

"I may have . . . I haven't thought of a man."

The two looked at each other like duellists about to thrust. Both knew that the next word would open the struggle, and both were afraid, enveloped their thoughts, feinted to gain ground and time.

"Well," said Madame Duvernoy at length, "why don't you? Oh, don't interrupt me," she added precipitately, "don't be impetuous and silly. You'll have to marry some day, and Madeleine is charming, in every way quite the right girl, young, pretty, musical; she will be smart when she is married, and you'll buy a fine practice in Paris with her *dot*. Besides, she likes you."

"Oh, does she?" Henri could not feel offended, for the girl recalled Suzanne. She had something of her colouring and carriage; indeed, his hunted soul

suddenly prompted him to say "yes" so that he might take refuge in the arms of Madeleine. They would be gentle, perhaps loving, if it was true that already she liked him. To say "Yes" would end the horrible tenseness which had made life a burden for three years. But, as he was about to speak and say the desperate non-committal thing which would commit him, he rallied his energies and said bluntly—

"No."

"No what?"

"I won't marry her."

"You won't marry her? Why won't you marry her? Isn't she good enough for you? Isn't she everything you could want?" Madame Duvernoy's voice rose to a scream. "You're ungrateful, you're a bad son, you don't respect me, you don't give me the affection you owe me. Oh, I'm so unhappy; I'm so unhappy." There were sobs in her voice now.

"*Maman*," said Henri huskily, "I'm sorry, I can't."

"Why can't you? Surely you're not thinking of that old affair. That's impossible. I forbid it, and besides, it's all over."

"It's not."

"What do you mean?" An awful fear had shot through her.

"I'll never give her up."

"Oh . . ." Madame Duvernoy felt reassured. "Well, what's the use of that? Give her up or not, you know quite well we won't consent. So there's an end of it. You'd do better to be sensible and talk about Madeleine."

"It's no use talking about Madeleine. She's a nice

girl and a pretty girl, but I'm not in love with her, and I can't marry her; and understand, *maman*, that I won't marry her."

There were some minutes of silence during which they did not look at each other. Henri gazed miserably at the pale sky, while his mother, a little frightened by his violence, nervously rolled her handkerchief into a ball. Then she decided to return to the charge.

"You're making me so unhappy. I had hoped so much, Henri. I thought of you as you are now twenty-eight years ago; I thought you would grow up handsome and charming, and win prizes at school, and be well conducted in the army . . ."

"Well, I didn't disappoint you, did I?"

"No, not then. You were a good boy, but now . . . now. You see, Henri, I wanted to think of you too marrying a nice girl, *bien élevée*, with some money, and getting on in a good practice, and knowing nice people, and having one or say two children, to remind me of you when you were small."

The mother and the son looked at each other sorrowfully. They stood face to face gazing at the same dream; both wanted almost the same things, home, peace, ease and love, but they could not agree as to the earthly instrument. They were joined by it and parted; their similar interests were hopelessly divergent and they could not converge, for the desire of the son was for freedom, the right to use life and waste it if he chose in the pursuit of joy; the desire of the mother to protect him, to make his way secure and to defend him against the temptation which might import into his life the slightest element of danger. She might play with her own happiness, but his she must secure

according to her lights, lights which she must think of as radiant.

"*Maman*," said Henri at length, "you could have all that. If you let me marry Suzanne."

"No."

"Why won't you?" Henri asked suddenly. "What have you against her? Have you ever heard a word against her? Ever seen or heard her do anything to make you . . . blush?"

"No, no, I didn't say that . . . only . . ."

"Well, then? Why? Money, I suppose, always money. I'm sick of money, of the sacrifice of everything for money. Money's your God, everybody's God. Well, I don't believe in it, and I'm not going to bow to it."

"How?" The mother breathed rather fast; the turning of the tables on her was discomposing.

"Oh . . . I don't know. Anyhow, I won't marry Madeleine, and I won't marry anybody . . . except Suzanne."

"You shall not marry her. I forbid it. Bernay is a rogue, and everybody knows it."

"I don't care if he is. He wasn't too much of a rogue for us to ask him to dinner."

"Henri!" said Madame Duvernoy in a scandalised tone, "you forget that was a matter of business. One has to do things like that; it's not nice, of course, but a barrister's business is so social. You mustn't be ridiculous, *chevaleresque*, all that; you might as well say that you wouldn't defend a man unless you thought he was in the right."

"I don't say that." His mother's sudden flanking movement and the involution of his professional ethics had broken his rush. "Anyhow, I don't care,"

he resumed lamely, "it's his daughter I want, not him. And I'll have her."

"Perhaps she won't have you. No," Madame Duvernoy pursued with joyful cruelty, "three years is a long time. It's all right when you're married; you get a habit, which is just as good as love, but it's different when you don't meet."

Henri was entrapped. He must either agree that Suzanne might have forgotten him, or confess that he frequently met her and was assured of her love. Struggling for expression he blustered. "No," he found himself saying trenchantly, "she hasn't forgotten me. She's waiting for me. She's the only girl I ever loved, and the only one I'll ever love, and I'll marry her yet."

"Henri!"

"Yes, I will. I won't be driven and bullied."

"I'm not bullying you."

His angry eyes were very threatening.

"You are. You're trying to make me marry Madeleine Arnaud. I wouldn't have her if she had Rothschild's millions. I won't be bullied. And I'll marry whom I like."

He rose from his chair and strode about the room.

"I've been patient long enough, and the time has come for . . . well, I will have her. I'm not a child, I've got a right to my own way—I'm twenty-eight . . . I . . . I'll . . ."

The door slammed behind him. Madame Duvernoy shivered. What had he said? What had he meant?

CHAPTER THE SECOND

LA FORTUNE

I

GRANDFATHER LACOUR was a very wise man. When he reached Paris in 1860 with his rosary, his scapulary, his eleven napoleons and his grandmother's amethyst brooch, he thought it better to marry so as to have his mind free from sentiment and concentrated on his work. He married most judiciously a *demoiselle* Romain, some ten years his senior and the co-owner with her sister of a lace-shop in the Rue de Rivoli. His wife retained a small interest in the business which her sister carried on, but she soon had reason to regret that she had abandoned it for her husband's "Fers de France," however prosperous the latter were. For in the heyday of the Second Empire, when no Hohenzollern had yet appeared to shift the Vosges to the Pyrenees, one morning the Emperor and his consort came driving by. A trace broke, the imperial couple alighted and Mademoiselle Romain's fortune was made. For the Impératrice Eugénie said—

"*Ah, la belle dentelle,*" and invested on the spot five napoleons. After that Mademoiselle Romain sold lace at outrageous prices to everybody who was somebody, to Mrs. Thackeray, to Lady Beaconsfield,

to Taglioni and the *corps de ballet*, to Madame Bazaine and the Duchesse d'Aumale. As she was given to smuggling her profits were very large, so large that, as she lived all through the years in one room with sham flower-pots and an odorous poodle, she was able to retire in 1873 to a villa at Argenteuil. There she tried in vain to grow asparagus, and was very happy with the poodle. As it was understood that she had a good deal of money and was not likely to marry, little Marthe Lacour and her brother who was to be a dragoon were regularly taken to call on their aunt. She gave them every time three *cerises à l'eau de vie*, every half-year twenty francs each, and every Easter Day a devotional book.

All went admirably until, one sunny day in 1876, Mademoiselle Romain informed her brother-in-law that her poodle (a successor of the others, odorous too) had developed a distressing complaint; namely, worms. She did not veil the matter, as a discreet Anglo-Saxon or New England spinster would have done. The dog, she said, had worms. The dog was a *sale cochon*. Also she loved him more than life. Then she abundantly wept. Old Lacour was a business man; no one better than he understood pots and pans and tacks and needles and rolling stock. But he thought he understood dogs.

"Raw meat," he said briefly, "that'll settle it."

The poodle was fed on raw meat. A fortnight later Lacour received a letter saying that the dog had another complaint. The vet. said it was eczema and that the raw meat had done it. Old Lacour, she went on, was a brute and a fool, didn't know what he was talking about and had done it on purpose. Protests availed nothing, for the eczema having begun

refused to stop ; it spread ; the dog became so odorous that even his mistress noticed it. At last the disease spread so successfully all over him that the vet. had to shoot him, while Mademoiselle Romain wept and screamed in the attic.

After that there were no more visits from the Lacour children, no more tips, *cerises à l'eau de vie* or devotional books. Her brother-in-law, she declared, was a *bandit*, a *brigand*, a *Républicain*. She would never see him again. She would give up dogs. She would take up with the Jesuits. She effected the exchange, fell into high devotion and, by the time Henri was twenty-eight, had become a legend of the Lacour family. It was assumed that she would leave her money to the Jesuits, and she would probably have done so if, at the age of ninety-one, she had not made an original discovery. It was the first she had ever made and a most unfortunate, for she suddenly found after an ill-fated experiment that she returned from Lourdes with an attack of rheumatism greater than the one she took there. She had caught cold and, being anxious at once to fix responsibilities on the proper people, tore up the will that endowed the Jesuits, and after casting about for available relations, found that she hated the memory of all of them. Henri Duvernoy alone she knew of as a nice little prize-winning boy : she made him her heir and, having revenged herself on the Jesuits, peacefully died.

II

Henri looked at himself in the hall wardrobe mirror. He saw a rather stout and florid young man, fairly

smart, not bad-looking. But he was not thinking of his appearance: he was merely gazing at the picture of the young possessor of three hundred thousand francs. It was not, he reflected, a very vast sum, say nine thousand francs a year. Still there it was; a nice little bit of capital, and the interest added to his salary would bring up his independent income to about twelve thousand francs a year. He rather glowed, he wondered whether everybody knew that he had three hundred thousand francs; if not, they ought to know. But would it be delicate to tell them? This was rather a worrying idea, for of course it would not do to brag of his wealth. So Henri chose the indirect method of tipping, for unaccustomed tipping would arouse interest and then the wonderful truth would leak out. The tipping did arouse interest the very same day.

"Henri," said Madame Duvernoy, with some severity, "why did you give twenty francs to each of the servants?"

"Oh, just because I've inherited some money, *maman*, I seldom give them anything."

"Well, why should you? You'll have to give them something in three weeks, for the New Year. It's sheer waste. And thirty francs to the *concierge*! how could you do such a thing? You know quite well that we only give him forty francs on New Year's Day; you'll make him expect more, fifty francs, perhaps sixty. Really you are ridiculous."

"*Monsieur est capitaliste*," sneered Monsieur Duvernoy, "he casts patronage over the poor as the sun casts light over the earth." He was furious; he hated the idea of his son having money, such a lot of money and for nothing.

Henri did not attempt to justify himself; he dared not, for to have told the whole truth would have been impossible. He had been doing dreadful things. Immediately on going out he had hailed a taxi and tipped the amazed chauffeur a franc. He had walked up the Rue Auber and the Boulevards with the confidence of an English Lord; he had suddenly realised that he would never buy another tie at Le Sport, nor a suit at Cook's. He had at last done the thing he had wanted to do for years: he had walked into Delion's, smoking an expensive imported Three Castles cigarette, and bought a top-hat for twenty-eight francs. It was delicious and terrible. Lastly, and this would probably prove still more terrible, he had called in at Marquis's and ordered for his mother two pounds of costly chocolates in a pink satin hand-painted bag.

For two days he had very mixed weather; he was either buying things he had never known himself to want, or getting into trouble for buying them. Buying had suddenly become a passion with him; within a week he had completely renewed his clothes, and for the first time in his life ordered twelve shirts at a time; he had met Jacques Sorel while buying coloured under-clothes at Tremlett's.

"Ah, ah," said Sorel, as he smiled with his wide mouth and inclined his yellow head, "mauve under-clothes . . . we know what that means. Still, Duvernoy, you shouldn't, you really shouldn't; you're too fair for mauve. Try pink, like me. Now, when I wear anything but pink or light blue . . ."

Sorel compromised several honoured names.

"I don't mind," said Henri stoutly, "I'm not a dandy in my under-clothes."

"You should be. That's the time or never. Now Pervenche, his latest idea is white with coloured flowers, as if he were tattooed. *C'est passionnant!*"

"White is too expensive," said Henri, "you've got to change too often."

Sorel sniffed at this detestably *bourgeois* remark. Still Henri had gone up in his estimation. After all Tremlett was Tremlett. Henri was getting on. And Henri, realising this very fully, liked him for the first time in his life.

III

"Henri," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "what have you done with your money?"

"It's at the Crédit Lyonnais just now until . . . until I invest it." He consciously swelled as he spoke the sacred words.

"Hum. Have you thought of how you'd invest it?" asked the father. He hated the conversation, for after all it was not his money; it was almost an enemy's money. Still, money it was, lovely money, power, chinking, delicious power. It fascinated him as if he could see it in a big golden heap.

"Well . . . yes . . . I have a little." Henri had thought of it a good deal but was in a great mess. He had bought *La Cote* and the *Cote de la Bourse et de la Banque*, but they had not helped him much; the extraordinary differences between quotations of Spanish Fours and Portuguese and Argentines left him wondering, while French Rails, their incomprehensible *actions de jouissance*, and the yet more obscure Rand Mines marked five shillings

on one side and two hundred francs on the other left him floundering in a morass.

"I . . . I had thought of Rente," he said at length, as importantly as he could.

"You won't lose your money," said Monsieur Duvernoy, with an almost kindly smile, for the suggestion seemed agreeably idiotic, "but I think you might do better."

"Oui, papa?"

"Yes, I could get you mortgages, four per cent. easily, five perhaps."

"Oh!" Henri thought and disliked the idea. He did not want his father to handle his money. He did not distrust his father: still, he liked managing his own money. If he didn't it wouldn't be his money. Henri was just above the level of those who want to keep their fortune in a drawer and, in fact, had already constituted two little hoards, one of a hundred francs in gold, in the toe of an old boot, and another of thirty francs in silver behind the reposeful volumes of Victor Hugo's complete works in his bedroom.

"Is that safe?" he asked at last.

"Quite safe, of course not very easy to realise at any moment."

"I don't want my money locked up," said Henri, seizing his opportunity to escape.

"Well, then you must buy stocks and shares, but be careful. They're not all good."

"I shall ask a financial paper," said Henri at last.

"You can ask a financial paper," said Monsieur Duvernoy savagely, "and they'll plug you with anything some rotten bank happens to be underwriting, Russians, anything."

"Oh!" Henri thought that the path of wealth was

very uneven. Still, he wasn't the kind of man to be diddled, he reflected. "Will they? But I'm not going to buy anything they say. I'm going to buy foreign loans and . . . Ville de Paris."

"Ville de Paris," Monsieur Duvernoy shouted, "but you are idiotic, Henri. They pay you two and a half per cent. and . . . but surely you don't think you'll win a prize?"

"How do you know? Somebody does."

"Yes, one in a million. Now, be reasonable and let me do it for you."

But the blunt suggestion made Henri quite obstinate. No, he was going to do it himself; at last his father, feeling that another word would compromise him, called him an *espèce d'imbécile* and left the room.

An interview with the branch manager of Javal's *agence* resulted in a delirious purchase of stock. Advised by him he spread his fortune evenly over Spanish Fours, French Threes, Argentine Fours and Turkish Fours, two hundred ordinary shares of the Nord railway and some Lombards; this, the manager assured him, was so international as to enable him to look forward with equanimity to war and pestilence. But Henri was bent also on his small gamble and purchased ten Panama bonds, ten Ville de Paris bonds and ten *obligations communales* of the Crédit Foncier. On these, thanks to the reduction of interest to an average of two and a half per cent. (except in the case of the Panama, which yielded nothing), he stood to win anything between a hundred francs and five hundred thousand. These lottery bonds filled him with delight, for the bank had, to please him, sent out to the nearest money-changer's

office and bought them for cash. They were quite lovely, the red and yellow Panamas, the purple "Communes" and the elaborately decorated Ville de Paris; their fateful numbers were going to be a great source of excitement, for the drawings were so arranged as to happen on an average every month. Besides, he could lose nothing. It was a typically French investment.

"Well," said Javal a little bitterly, "are you pleased?"

"Pleased! I don't know what to say. I feel so independent, as if I didn't care for anything, I . . ." He stopped abruptly, realising that poor little Javal and his Letitia had not between them as much capital as he would draw every year as an income. This suddenly struck him as horrible and extraordinary. "I . . . will you come to the theatre with me to-night? both of you?" he asked rather lamely.

Javal sighed, then accepted the peace-offering. Letitia loved the play. There was a piece she wanted to see. . . . Javal sniggered and whispered . . . Henri blushed and then recaptured himself. Hang it all, he must remember that he was a man . . . a man of the world . . . all that.

IV

The episode of Henri's investment cast a coldness over the household. Madame Duvernoy kept up for two days the pretence that she too was gravely offended, but the money haunted her; she could hardly think of anything beyond that money; she conjured up horrible ideas of Henri buying the wrong

thing, investing in Costa Ricas, or in the shares of some dying boot factory. At last she had to question him, and, when she recited the list to her husband, was assured that it was quite sound; indeed there was no flaw in it, except those absurd lottery bonds. Fortunately they were quite safe, even if they wasted a good half per cent. The upshot was that Madame Duvernoy's respect for her son increased; he was impractical in love, but he might be a financial genius. Besides, the lottery bonds hypnotised her; at heart she loved lottery bonds; she had a delicious secret about lottery bonds.

"I say, Henri," she remarked, "about your lottery bonds."

"*Oui, maman,*" said Henri suspiciously. He had been a good deal bullied about those beastly investments.

"Have you got hold of a list of drawn numbers?"

"Drawn? What do you mean? There's been no drawing yet."

"I mean unclaimed prizes. Perhaps one of your bonds was drawn long ago with a prize. Perhaps the money-changer didn't check them." Mother and son looked at one another with shining eyes; it was an exciting idea.

"Oh," said Henri, "I must get a list and see. Yes."

"You needn't," his mother whispered; "I've got one."

"You? Why?"

Madame Duvernoy laughed. "Don't tell your father, but I, I too, I've got a few."

Henri burst out laughing. His rigid father harboured two gamblers, then; his mother had fifteen

Panamas and some old bonds of the 1889 Exhibition. As they pored together (in vain) over the lists of unclaimed prizes, a feeling of friendliness such as had abandoned them for over three years seemed about to return. Henri realised that his mother was still young, that she enjoyed being naughty and defying her husband's principles. And she, how dear she would hold him . . . if only that terrible attachment were not there.

Generally speaking, in those last days of December Henri's was a happy life. He had not yet begun to see clearly how his position in the world was modified, how his relation with Suzanne might suddenly undergo a revolution. In a sense he knew that his position had greatly changed, that he had become independent, and could, if he chose, at once buy the practice which would make him a solid and considered *avoué*. But independence, which rushes in upon nimble minds like a flood and sweeps them away, did not so powerfully sway him; it was for him evolution rather than revolution. He had passed the stage of wanting to tell everybody he was rich; already the habit of wealth was upon him, and cooled his enthusiasm, cooled it enough for him to understand that Rothschild and Lebaudy were richer than he. He had passed the stage of fierce tipping; soon he would buy hats and boots and stalls at the Gymnase without any sense of adventure. He had related his money to all these material things, and had found them commonplace; Suzanne alone had not been clearly associated in his mind with the fact, obvious to any but he, that he need no longer trouble about his parents, but could marry her in the face of the world's opposition. Nothing of this had been formulated in

his brain with any degree of lucidity; he was too weak, too dependent, enslaved by twenty-eight years of maternal discipline and an æon of tradition. If the thought was there at all, it was there as a background, misty and grey, which the black and definite figures of his father and mother overpowered as they passed in front of it. It was left to the vigorous Letitia to stimulate his imagination. She was glad, intimately glad, not jealous, as was her husband, or depressed, when she contrasted her lot with that of Suzanne and Henri. It was not that she did not desire wealth or ease; indeed, she wanted them as much as any Parisian woman: she would have liked to have a motor-car, to buy six-hundred-franc hats from Georgette, to indulge in the almost Eastern luxury which is dear to the Parisian heart. But she also had the fine common sense which, curiously, goes with these violent desires. She knew that her husband was a man of medium ability, and could not feel sure of pushing him higher in the world than a branch managership of the *Crédit Lyonnais*; this would mean anything between seven and fifteen thousand francs a year—in no case wealth as Paris understands the word; apart from this, which she was ready to accept as being the inevitable, she knew that she was fond of Javal without ardour, that his indecision appealed to her energy, and his physical weakness to her fine brute strength. She was the man in their marriage, and as such had to practise mental discipline.

What Madame Javal felt for herself, however, she did not feel for Suzanne, the playmate who was, after all, nothing but a charming child. There was no force in Suzanne, nothing but delicacy: thus she needed helping and protecting; she could not make her mar-

riage, tear from fate's hard hands a shred of joy; so those who loved her most must help her to enjoy the fruits of battle, without driving her, reluctant and half beaten, into the bloody ring. Letitia Javal wanted to see this couple come together; she did not respect Henri, but, as Suzanne loved him, she wanted him for her. Not only did she feel that she was Suzanne's big sister, but the obscure instinct that is in women, old, young, joyful, or rejected of men, bade her use every effort so that the lovers could marry and fulfil its ruthless purpose. It thrilled her to think of Suzanne as wedding this weak young man—for it was a wedding, after all—as it thrilled her to read of men shooting their wives' lovers, of women vitrioling men who had forsaken them, of gorgeous suicides caused by love. For all of it was mating, and Letitia, a true woman, was the spirit of mating on earth. For her the situation was simple enough, so simple that she frontally attacked Henri on Christmas Day. It was a holiday, though of no importance in France except for the children, who place their shoes on the hearth for *le petit Noël* to fill. (Santa Claus does not call in France, but sends in his stead a pretty golden-haired child.)

"Well," she said suddenly, as she threw herself back in the rep arm-chair, the best the Rue Montetonotte flat possessed, "what are you going to do now you're rich, Henri?"

"Oh, I'm not exactly rich."

"No, not exactly, except that you've got just about four times as much to marry on as we had."

"Marry? . . . Oh, I don't say it isn't enough, if Suzanne agrees."

"Suzanne? Oh, *mon pauvre Henri*, as if Suzanne

wouldn't agree to marry you on anything. She'd have married you three years ago on your two hundred francs a month, and you've wasted those years."

"Yes, I know," said Henri hurriedly. "I would have, too, only I couldn't."

"You could have, if you had chosen. One always can. Look at me! Oh, you may say I wasn't accustomed to luxury like you two, though that's no argument, for I was a hanger-on, and hangers-on are at heart fonder of wealth than the rich, or they wouldn't stand what they do. But never mind my history. The question is: Are you going to marry Suzanne, say next month?"

"Next month?" Henri gasped. "But how? . . . But my mother . . . you know what she says . . . she won't agree."

"Tell your mother to mind her own business. Inform her that you intend to marry Suzanne—well, let us say on the thirty-first of January. That'll give us five weeks for the trousseau. As you can afford a honeymoon, I recommend Italy; you may not be able to afford it later on."

Henri looked at Letitia with amazed eyes. He felt driven, overwhelmed. There was the whole plan laid before him in fifty words. Still, it wouldn't happen just like that—there were difficulties—however fascinating it all was.

"But . . . but my mother won't consent."

"Good. Ask her once and for all. She declines. You go out and tell the *huissier* to call next morning and summons her. He does so, once, twice, three times. Then off to the *mairie*, up with the banns. Little ceremony. Paternal speech by the *maire*. All

over. If Suzanne likes, fifty francs wasted on a *calotin* to mumble a prayer over you. *Voilà.*"

Henri was silent for a moment. He did not understand the reason for the glow in Letitia's eyes, her heightened colour. The fighting policy did not stimulate him as it did her. It frightened him.

"I couldn't," he said weakly. "*Maman* would never forgive me. I must try and bring her round; wait. . . ."

"Wait," shouted Letitia, as she leapt to her feet and stamped about the little room, "wait, wait, wait until you're old, and waiting's made you so tired of one another that you don't want one another any more; wait until you're bald and she's got lines all over her pretty face; wait until you kiss her like a sister, or until you're dead."

"I . . . I don't mean that. . . ."

"Then what do you mean? Do you know what you mean? You mean nothing; you're afraid."

"Afraid?" said Henri in a tone that showed he was nettled.

"Yes, afraid; afraid of life, afraid of fighting. For it's fighting you've got to do if you want to live. If you haven't the courage to live, you may as well commit suicide, for you're only cumbering the earth. I tell you you've got to fight; you've got to, if you're rich and want fame; you've got to, if you're poor and want money; you've got to, if you're a king and want to marry your chosen, and not a Bourbon with an ugly nose and half-a-dozen hereditary diseases."

"Yes . . . I know . . . but still there is consideration . . . there are things one must draw the line at. . . ."

"No. There is no line, except the firing-line, and

there is no consideration, except for yourself and those you love. But, of course, you don't love Suzanne."

"What!" cried Henri. "How can you say I don't love her?"

"What will you do for her? Will you go through fire and water for her, slay dragons, tilt at wind-mills?"

"*Voyons, Letitia*, do not be absurd."

"I am not absurd," said Letitia angrily; "it's you who can't understand me. I'm telling you to imitate Perseus and Don Quixote; I'm telling you to be a modern Perseus, and go out and slay principles, instead of dragons. Go out and kill, or remain and be killed. Your dragons are conventions and customs; they are your own cowardice, which you call affection, your own weakness, which you call duty. But you ignore true affection and true duty, those things you owe to the girl whose love you have gained. You owe her marriage, and you've got to marry her at all costs. You've got to break your mother's opposition, if you've got to break her heart. She's done with; she's played her part now that you're born and grown up. She doesn't matter. She has no right to live, for she's only hampering you—you, the young man to whom the world belongs."

Henri was silent for a while; he was deeply shocked. If Letitia had been unmarried, he would have changed the subject as one unfit for a young girl; but she was married, and had rights.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that one owes nothing to one's mother?"

"Nothing. You owe life to Nature, of which she is merely the instrument. If you have a debt, it is to your unborn child. Your mother's only a barnacle,

and you're the ship . . . and you know that before a voyage it is customary to scrape the keel."

"You're very hard, rather cruel, Letitia."

"I am a lover of life; you are a respecter of death. For yesterday is dead. Your mother is yesterday; you are to-morrow."

"I begin to understand," said Henri more gently.

"I know you've had a hard life, Letitia; that's why you're so harsh."

"You've had an easy one; that's why you're so soft."

"Perhaps. Perhaps I am soft. You see, I don't want to hurt my mother; she loves me; she's done everything for me. It seems so cruel to turn away now and do, because I want to, a thing which will make her miserable."

"Oh, she'll recover. Women get over anything; they've got to."

"But why should she have to? I can prevent it, and I ought to, for she loves me more than anything in the world."

"That's the weight you carry, *mon pauvre Henri*: her love tied round your neck; an exacting affection is nothing but a millstone. Let her love you, and let her suffer. Let her fight for you if she can, that's her rôle; it's for her to frighten you with big words like 'duty' and 'filial respect,' to threaten that she will disinherit you, to entrap you into a match of her choosing. That's war, and that's fair; that's life. But you too have a rôle: to frighten her by threatening never to see her again, to trick her by feigning illness, to break her by defying her, to kill her by cruelty if you must. It's force wins: hatred, cruelty, violence. Not love."

"Ah, love!" said Henri. "It would be so much better, so much sweeter. Your ideal is a hard world, Letitia; I want it full of humanity and love."

"*Sentimental*," said Letitia angrily. She had lost the game.

V

Henri's interview with Letitia produced but one idea. She had not shaken him, but merely disturbed him; now and then while she spoke he had been fired by her splendid animalism, for she touched in him a secret chord, the instinct of survival. She stimulated this natural pugnacity, goaded him to sally out and attack out of sheer savagery unoffending as well as offending things. But her violence defeated its object, for he was not ready for life, he had not grasped that it was attained in a struggle, maintained by more struggles and lost in a desperate battle. He was too heavily overlaid by tradition and disciplined by habit; he had for too long taken authority for granted, never seen that when the rights of the soul are menaced insurrection becomes the most sacred of duties.

On Christmas night he walked aimlessly along the Champs Elysées thinking of Letitia's words and decided that she was wrong, that her gospel of contest was cruel, unnecessary and certainly improper for a woman to hold. He felt sure that somehow his mother would be brought round, that he would marry Suzanne and that soon they would all live happily together. Still, he felt he ought to do something, approach his mother again, or—and here was a first-

fruit of Letitia's teaching—publish still further his unofficial engagement so as to compromise himself and try to force his mother's hand. But all this was undecisive, and with Letitia's fiery speeches still floating in his brain he suddenly evolved his brilliant idea. He would give Suzanne a present, a really fine present, a crocodile skin dressing-bag, with gold-topped bottles. Then he reflected it would be very dear; on the other hand he could afford it. But, he reflected again, if they married on twelve thousand francs a year she would not need anything so costly. It was, his amiable *bourgeois* soul decided, waste. He then thought of jewellery, for jewellery was always worth three-quarters of what it cost if you saw to it that you paid mainly for the stones and gold, not for workmanship. Yes, he had it, he would buy her a diamond necklace. He'd show them what stuff he was made of. He wouldn't be bullied. Then fine snow began to fall. Henri hurried home, for it would never do for him to get his feet wet.

The purchase of the necklace was a delicious affair, an adventure. He resisted his first impulse to ask old Loupil to get him a commission note from his brother the exporter, even though this would procure him a rebate of at least ten per cent. No, he would do the thing properly, go to Tiffany or Cartier. He walked up and down the Rue de la Paix and the Avenue de l'Opéra with a great air, swinging a thirty-franc cane and gazing at the lovely *mannequins* with novel insolence; the pocket-book in his waistcoat owned the neighbourhood. He took his time, inspected the scanty but graceful shows of bracelets, collars and pendants, felt a little rueful in front of a pearl necklace every pearl of which would probably cost a couple

of thousand francs. In a sense it was all too rich for him, which depressed him, and yet accessible, which exhilarated him. At last he entered Cartier's shop, much impressed by its air, half drawing-room and half museum; he was so much impressed that he assumed too much importance and was shown a collar of emeralds which *La Belle Otero* would not have despised.

"How much?" he asked airily.

"Seventy thousand francs, Monsieur."

"Oh!" He was dashed, but his recovery was noble.

"No, not that, altogether too . . . too ostentatious. It's for a *jeune fille*."

"*Certainement, Monsieur*," said the assistant, with oily courtesy, as he deftly returned the emeralds to their case and produced a little string of diamonds set in gold. "This, Monsieur, is a charming present for a *jeune fille*, four thousand francs." He smiled respectfully at his client (at Cartier's there are no "customers"), for he had gauged his means by a single trial shot.

Henri examined the necklace with the eye of a *connaissanceur*, blew on the stones and then drew them across his sleeve. He knew the etiquette. "*Pas mal, pas mal*," he muttered; "still, let me see something better." He wasn't going to let Cartier sniff at him.

For a quarter of an hour he selected and discarded, in his audacity even returning for a while to the emeralds. At last he selected a fairly good necklace made up of twenty white diamonds. It cost eight thousand francs, but seemed a little small among its fellows. It was not until these had been restored to their cases that Henri realised it as fine. As a monopolist it glowed finely; it was good, too, to lay down

the eight notes of a thousand francs each, to drop the round green leather case into a careless pocket, to walk away with, in that pocket, a hand that nervously clasped the treasure. Henri could hardly hold himself in; he wanted to take it out and look at it, but that would have been risky. At last he could bear it no more, jumped into a taxi-cab and, in this shelter, gloated his fill.

He gloated for two days, for there was no opportunity at home of telling his mother what he had done. He wanted to, for this threw down the glove, and yet he dared not, for he knew his mother would pick it up. He had insane impulses; he wanted to jump up from the lunch-table and shout, "I love Suzanne, I've given her a necklace, it cost eight thousand francs—eight thousand francs!" He wondered what would happen if he did; this hypnotised him so that he embroidered the idea. He seriously turned over in his mind what his parents would say if he suddenly upset the table, danced on the crockery. He wanted to do all these things, not because insanity threatened him, but because he was bursting to do something, dazzle, astonish. And then the opportunity came of itself, as it must to the meek in spirit. On the third day, just as he came in for lunch, he pulled out his handkerchief . . . the case was entangled, fell to the ground and, as Henri had severely tested the patience of the spring, burst open, shedding the guilty gift at Madame Duvernoy's feet. Madame Duvernoy looked at the thing with raised hands, in the stage attitude of astonishment, as frightened as if this were a snake.

"What's that?" she faltered at length.

Henri hesitated, dominated by a great effort the

fluttering of his heart, and at last said, in a careless but strained voice—

“That? Oh, nothing; a present for Suzanne.”

There was a moment of silence, during which Henri awkwardly picked up the necklace. He did not look at his mother, and braced himself to receive her reproaches, to listen to her angry sorrow. But she said—

“How much did it cost?”

“Ten thousand francs,” said Henri, bombastic. He had lied instinctively, for effect, to make the battle hotter.

“Ah? *C'est du propre!* You . . . you are going well.”

“Maman, please . . .”

“No; listen to me. You are mad, you have lost your senses. Ten thousand francs for . . . for . . . for an affair like that. It's . . . Oh, I don't know what to say. . . . I never thought you'd do a thing like that, without my consent, behind my back. I should have thought you'd have told me. But no! if it had not been an accident I might never have known.”

“Oh, I should have told you, *maman*.”

“Indeed! When did you buy it?”

“Oh, I've just bought it.”

“Where? Show me the bill.”

“I haven't got it,” said Henri desperately, for the bill was dated three days back.

“Really? This is intolerable. Apart from this, which is an insult to me, you haven't even the sense to take a receipt. You're unfit to have money. But never mind that, that's the least of evils if you're going to be ruined by that girl and her vampire of

a mother. By what right do you give a present like this to a girl who is nothing to you?"

"She's my *fiancée*," said Henri.

"Really? I did not know it. Not with my consent."

"*Maman*, I beg you . . ."

"Silence! What I have said I have said. Never, never, never. Do you hear?"

Henri did not reply; his mother's anger reverted to the purchase.

"Ten thousand francs! It's madness; it's a sign. You're throwing your money away; oh, I've seen it, you're ruined, it's all over. You're drunk with buying, hats, boots, ties, taxis, theatres, and the rest I don't know of, debauchery of all sorts."

"*Maman*," said Henri angrily, "you've no right to say that."

"You come and talk to me of rights! Now look here, Henri, do what you like, but I shall never consent. Spend your money on frippery and folly, spend it on your . . . on Suzanne . . . you can give it to her if you like. . . ."

"Well, that would provide her with the necessary *dot*," said Henri suddenly.

Madame Duvernoy looked dazed. Never before had Henri countered swiftly like this. The shock jarred every nerve of her.

"Do not be idiotic," she faltered; then she regained strength. "No, I won't have you sacrificed. I won't have this fortune wasted."

"Well, it's my fortune," said Henri obstinately.

"No; it's the fortune of your family."

"I don't care. I'll do what I like."

"Ah, you will. Do what you like then, be a bad

son, a madman. I don't care. I've had enough. No, listen, you're going to promise not to send this to Suzanne, to take it back to the shop."

"No."

"I say yes. I won't have you entangled."

"I won't do it. I'll do what I like. I'll give it to her, and I'll give her more. After all, I am free, independent now . . . I won't be tyrannised over. I'll do what I like." His voice rose to a shout. "I'll do anything I like."

Madame Duvernoy opened her mouth to protest, but felt feeble; there was defiance here. Her son stopped her.

"It's no use. I've made up my mind. She shall have it to-day. Good-bye, I'm late as it is."

Madame Duvernoy remained alone in front of the little grate in the big brown stove. Not for one second did the idea of surrender cross her mind; narrow, grasping and without sympathy, she still had the virtue of courage, she could fight. The money was the enemy; how she hated that money, how clearly it showed her that Henri would ultimately revolt. For now he could revolt, marry the girl; whereas he formerly had two hundred and fifty francs a month, which made the wedding impossible, now he had twelve thousand francs a year. Yes, the money would beat her.

When her husband returned she told him the story of the day. He listened with a worried air as he twisted his grey moustache.

"Marthe," he said at length, "all this is very disturbing. Don't you think we might . . . well, still try and make him see reason . . . but if he seems bent upon this marriage . . . well . . ."

"Jules," Madame Duvernoy spoke in a tragic tone, for her husband was again going over to the enemy, "you say that . . . you? . . . Oh, how can you? Never, I will never consent."

"But what's to be done? Now he has money he will defy you."

The old people looked at each other sadly. Their attitude towards their son was peculiarly French: the boy must be held by love, for love was natural in the family; but he must also be held by money. With money in his purse filial love might not suffice.

"Perhaps," said Madame Duvernoy. "Oh, I almost wish he'd spend his money, that somebody could take it from him."

"One could, perhaps," said Monsieur Duvernoy at length.

"What?" screamed his wife. "How?"

"Well, he's been spending a lot lately. We might get a *conseil judiciaire*."

"A *conseil judiciaire*!"

"I think it could be arranged. The family—well, our family—will be willing. To tie up the interest of his capital is difficult, but . . . there is a way of arranging . . ."

"What way?"

"When the *conseil judiciaire* is appointed he can invest the money as he likes. . . . If he does so in stocks that yield nothing then Henri would have nothing . . . he could not marry."

"Jules! That is the only thing to do. I won't consent, I won't! It would kill me. You must arrange this."

"Well, I'll see; meanwhile, let him spend freely,

it'll be easier to get a judgment. But, Marthe, you're sure you'd rather not agree? After all, there's nothing against the girl."

"No."

Monsieur Duvernoy shrugged his shoulders. A sickening, life-spoiling affair. Still, he must do what his wife wanted.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

DIPLOMATIE

I

LITTLE by little the *conseil judiciaire* which was to solve all the troubles of the elder Duvernoys began to be their chief topic of conversation. Though no date had as yet been assigned them the proceedings were decided upon; there was nothing but hesitation such as overcomes the diver as he stands poised over the water to prevent the old people from taking the necessary steps. Take them, however, they would, for Madame Duvernoy had made up her mind even though she hesitated a little now, while her husband would follow her with misgivings but certainly. No, Madame Duvernoy would not be beaten: she was brave and strong, and never would she surrender so long as there was in her hand a weapon to fight with.

Thus the *conseil judiciaire* obsessed them. It was the one way out of their difficulty: if they allowed Henri to retain possession of his fortune he would inevitably revolt and find no obstacles in his way, for a young man with twelve thousand francs a year was a good match for the penniless Bernay girl, given especially that she had set her heart on him. If, on the other hand, his means could be reduced to his beggarly salary, then the Bernays would join the ring

and Henri, faced on every side by enemies, would return beaten and cowed to his mother's comforting arms. Yes, it was a good plot, so good that Madame Duvernoy had to talk about it, to ask her husband for a recital of details like a child for a favourite story.

"Jules," she would say, "tell me exactly how it works."

"I've already told you," her husband would reply, while a sulky look passed over his thin face.

"Tell me again." The dark eyes would glow, the small fat hands clench.

"Well, the *Code* says that when any person of means so behaves as to imperil his fortune, it shall be within the power of his family to come together and to form a *conseil de famille*. They shall examine the circumstances and, if they think fit, decide to apply to the Courts for a judgment withdrawing from the incriminated person the management of his fortune."

"Good, that's good," said Madame Duvernoy, her fat chin trembling with excitement.

"The Court shall investigate, hear the defence, and, if it thinks fit, shall appoint some person *conseil* of the defendant."

"Ah! And then? And then?"

"Then the defendant will no longer be able to dispose of his capital. He can purchase nothing, pass no contracts, enter into no agreements without the consent of his *conseil*; he may dispose of his income, but the investment thereof shall lie within the discretion of the *conseil*."

At this stage Madame Duvernoy would laugh if her mood was a savage one, or clap her hands with childish glee, as she hatched the fine plot for irrevocably binding her son, for making him yet more

hers by making him poor, enslaved. And, as she thought of him helpless she loved him more, for then he was no longer the sullen man she knew, a man with something like threats in his mouth, but almost the fat sprawling baby she had known who could not feed itself, not walk, not live without her.

The trifling recurrence of a scene on the Sunday following the affair of the diamond necklace set the wheels in motion. It was a small, an absurd incident. Henri had been on the Quai des Orfèvres and bought the complete works of Voltaire in calf, forty-six volumes."

"*C'est ridicule*," said Madame Duvernoy, "*ridicule*. You waste your money, Henri, you throw it about, you're not fit to have it, you buy things you don't want, you . . ."

"I do want Voltaire."

"No you don't, you won't read him. Besides, you can buy the whole of him at twenty-five centimes a volume in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*."

"I prefer these. Besides, I will read him."

"What's the use of it?"

"Voltaire is a classic."

"Oh yes, of course," said Madame Duvernoy, slightly abashed, for she respected the classics. She had been hearing about them all her life. Besides, they were compulsory for exams. But her economical soul could not bear the waste, so she returned to the charge. "Still, even if he is a classic, you're not going up for your *Baccalauréat*."

"Look here, *maman*," said Henri angrily, "this is my business; I shall spend my money as I like."

"Not with my consent."

"No? Then I'll spend it without."

"Henri!" Her tone was tragic.

"I shall," he replied, too angry to be influenced.

"I'm tired of being hectored and bullied."

"I'm not bullying you."

"Yes you are. I won't be bullied, I won't be told who I'm to know, what I'm to spend, what I'm to do. I've had enough. I'm going out."

"Where are you going to?"

"To the Bernays'." The sentence had slipped out and now already it had rushed away like a hound unleashed. Henri had never meant to say it, had never meant to go to the Bernays', and now, with his mother, watched the horrid effects of his unpremeditated words. But he lost courage and turned towards the door, passed out, slammed it so as to assure himself that he was still very angry and determined.

Madame Duvernoy stood motionless where he had left her. She felt numb, but strange enough she did not want to cry. Henri had as good as struck her in the face, but she took it less as an outrage than as a blow received in a fair fight. She wondered why she was so cool, why there was no excitement within her. Then, and very slowly, she knew: quicker and quicker, within her brain, something was throbbing; quicker still, she could feel the active purpose forming and gathering power; it was the machine, Henri had started the machine, and now it was beginning to work.

II

The Bernays received Henri with some hesitation. There was awkwardness even, for this was the first time he had formally called at their flat. Madame

Bernay knew that he often met her daughter at Madame Javal's flat, but this was very different, more definite. She was delighted to see him come out into the open, but she trembled as she realised that the battle must now be at its height. His visit was an act of defiance, an act which might show that he would stick at nothing. And, though he was a desirable suitor, she trembled as she thought of the clash of arms, and took refuge in the easy commonplaces with which is nowadays cloaked the equivalent of Greek tragedy.

"Charmed, charmed," she murmured; "how nice of you to come and see us, Monsieur Duvernoy. And *Madame votre mère*—is she well?"

"Yes, Madame, thanks, yes, very well," Henri muttered. He was wonderfully stirred by the intimacy of all this; they sat in the absurd *petit salon* on the tiny little odd chairs among the regiment of unsteady tables piled with trumpery. There was not in the room (as Madame Duvernoy would have *bourgeoisly* put it) an article worth a hundred-franc note. Still, it was part of the garden of Eden. In this flat Henri had for the first time held Suzanne in his arms; at its door he had touched with his her trembling lips. The memory of it made him catch his breath, so intense was it, so vivid.

Embarrassed and doubting the three sat down, watching one another covertly. Madame Bernay's commonplaces had come to an end and her heart beat as she realised that her next word must formally enlist her in one of the armies. Suzanne sat very erect on her little chair, her eyes downcast, her long idle hands loosely clasped in her lap. Henri looked at her with that fearful desirous hunger her presence inspired him

with; he thought that never had such beauty been as that which he read in the fine long lines of her shoulders and limbs. She sat, simply clad in a blue serge skirt and a blue *chiffon* blouse, unrelieved and severe, adorably aloof and grave as if the scene did not concern her, as if she did not realise the immense significance of it. But at last she raised her eyes towards her lover and, as their gaze met and united, they gained strength and purpose. They both felt the hungry impulse to leap to their feet and clasp their arms round each other in defiance of the witness and of the petty trammels of civilisation. But between them stood two cheap chairs and a little table. Henri found himself oddly wondering whether there would be a great smash if he ran to Suzanne, as he wanted to do. He seemed to lose his strength as he pictured the floor littered with bronze photograph frames and Venetian glass, so he spoke instead of doing.

"I hope you liked the diamond necklace, Madame."

"*Oh, oui*, it is beautiful. And how kind of you to give Suzanne such a beautiful gift. It was too much."

"Not too much for the girl I want to marry, Madame."

Silence fell heavy. The last commonplace had indeed been spoken and things could never again be what they had been, for now the three could nevermore pretend not to know. Madame Bernay misread his meaning.

"You mean . . ." she faltered excitedly . . . "your mother no longer . . . ?" Then caution and dignity asserted themselves. "You must not speak like that, Monsieur Duvernoy," she said with severity, "I do

not say that I don't know that you and Suzanne wish to . . . that you have come to an understanding, but you must agree that all this is not correct. It is very incorrect. Your father should speak to my husband; I can assure you that we will not make difficulties . . . that we will be glad to see both your father and your mother."

"Oh," said Henri in a low voice, "I don't mean that. *Maman* has not changed. She does not agree."

"Well," said Madame Bernay rather acidly, "then this is still more incorrect. I am amazed, Monsieur, amazed."

"*Maman*," said Suzanne miserably, "please, please don't speak like that. Don't make it more difficult. I can't bear it. I'm so unhappy, I can't go on like this for ever. . . ." She took her handkerchief from a little bag. "Oh, this waiting, it's awful, it's going on for ever, it's killing me. . . ." A sob escaped her. ". . . killing me. . . ."

"Suzanne," cried Henri. He heard himself shout, felt himself leap forward. The expected happened, he knocked down the table of knick-knacks, the bronze frames, the Venetian glass. But he was kneeling by Suzanne's side, was holding in his arms her throbbing frame, while she wept on his shoulder in great choking sobs. "*Suzanne, ma petite Suzanne*," he murmured at intervals as he clasped her to him. Still she wept as she desperately clung to him. She wept and, as he stroked the soft dark hair with an unsteady hand, he too felt tears in his eyes. They clung to each other, these two weak and fearful children, thus infusing into their relation the reality of sorrow, the only reality known to the weak; they were conscious in this close contact that physical propinquity alone would

enable them to resist the massive forces of habit and heredity. They clung, they could do nothing but cling.

"*Voyons, Suzanne*," said Madame Bernay at last as she surveyed the group with horrified bewilderment, "stop crying, please stop. Monsieur Duvernoy, leave go of Suzanne at once."

The lovers parted and Henri stood miserably by while Suzanne wiped her eyes.

"This cannot go on," said Madame Bernay angrily. Her worn face had gained colour; even her grey hair seemed agitated. "There must be some end to this. If you really want to marry Suzanne . . . well, I will break my own rules and consent at once."

"*Madame!*" said Henri gratefully.

"Yes, but I will not wait."

"But what am I to do? My mother still refuses."

"You must force her. You . . . you can . . . well, you are twenty-eight and can do as you choose. I hear you have a small private fortune, perhaps not as much as I should have liked. Still," and her tone became condescending, "I will overlook that as you really seem attached to Suzanne. But you must act at once."

"You mean," said Henri slowly, "that I must defy my mother?"

"I . . . of course it is not pleasant."

"But mustn't I respect my mother's wishes?"

Madame Bernay was nonplussed. The position was very unpleasant, for she was a mother herself and French mothers have *esprit de corps*. "Well . . . I do not say it is pleasant. Naturally, a mother must be listened to . . . she has rights to respect, affection. But there are cases when . . . well, there are excep-

tions to all rules. . . . You have given her every opportunity."

"Yes, I have. And still she won't consent."

"But then, Monsieur Duvernoy, what are you going to do? Are you going to wait for your mother to die?"

Henri was shocked. Madame Bernay was suggesting to him that his mother's death might end his troubles. The horror of the suggestion lay in its truth.

"Oh no," he said very firmly, "I have every hope . . . you see she knows I am here. It will influence her. Oh, I am sure it will."

The argument wound about them involving them horribly. Madame Bernay struggled for the rights of parents and for the rights of revolting children until she no longer knew on whose side she was, while Henri made giant but vain efforts to escape from his chains, to promise to face his mother and break her. Again and again the same sentences recurred: "You must do something," and "Yes, but my mother's wishes?" While Suzanne sat, her long hands clasped in her lap, these two fought for her in the desperate dark. They fought without knowing their enemy, less against each other than against the state of society which held them. They struggled like swimmers among the snags against the custom of centuries, the sale of young women to the highest bidder, property, the family, the rights of parents, tradition, traditional respect, traditional affection. They could see like a faint light in the darkness something that glimmered, a freedom that knew respect and yet knew strength, but they could not make for it, the snags were too heavy on their faint limbs.

When again Henri stood in the street he felt exhausted, as if he had fought an antagonist stronger than he. He had fought the French tradition, promised to try and defy it, and now that he was going out alone to meet it, he was again afraid.

III

The machine which had begun to work in Madame Duvernoy's capable brain did not stop. It was the kind of machine which did not stop until its work was done, for nothing was neglected by its owner to keep it going; she fed it with maternal love and maternal jealousy, with lust for money, for position, above all with the passionate yearning for domination which lives in the hearts of mothers when they have but one son. As she sat alone through that terrible disrupting afternoon, behind the door Henri had slammed as if he meant to prison her behind it while he lived out his life beyond, she recapitulated the events of the past three and a half years. She remembered him as the steady young man in regular and respectable employment while he learned the practical details of a profession in which he should ultimately shine; she saw him as a model son then, a young man of good appearance, with the manners of a gentleman, rich in the virtues of economy, sobriety and diligence; she remembered harshly rather than fondly his early returns to her from the office, his walks with her in the Avenue du Bois under the approving eyes of respected legal friends and remunerative Semitic acquaintances. In those days he dined at home, talked to her of books,

politics, friends, the weather, as if she were a sister rather than a mother. Then came the black days.

As she thought of the black days all pretence of tenderness vanished. The good young man became the poor weak thing in the hands of unscrupulous people; he was again the silly gaping fool taken in by the meretricious glow of Suzanne's dark eyes at that fatal dinner . . . he was the young man at the dance with the minx (she used a word harder than "minx") in his arms . . . the young man who called down shame and social complications upon her head by daring to call on those people. Her mind took a sudden turn, for now he was calling there again, and no longer furtively, no longer kissing Suzanne behind a door as the footman from the first floor might kiss the cook from the fourth. No, he had gone there openly and defiantly with his fortune as well as his name in his hands, to be tricked by those harpies, sucked dry; no doubt they had formally plighted their troth, those two, resolved to make a mockery of her, to break her heart if that was to break her will.

Madame Duvernoy paced round and round the dining-room, savagely pushing away the Henri II chairs that barred her way. Break her will! They should see; they might break her heart, but not her will; if she died she would die fighting. That Henri was a noodle mattered little: he was her son, therefore her property, and she must preserve him as she would shore up the tottering wall of her house or send her vicious horse to be tamed by starvation and stripes. And as she walked she lashed herself first into fury, then into a terrible frozen calm that was all intention. Indeed, when Henri at last returned with

an expression of muddled fear and defiance on his face, she was well past the stage where she could have reviled him. She was no longer a mother, she was a purpose.

So nothing happened. Henri stood before her waiting to be attacked, and was not molested; he watched her black eyes for a glitter, tried to find a tremor in her plump hands or a tightening in her little mouth. He looked in vain, for he had before him no longer his mother, but the principle of domination. He was faced by the reincarnation of ten generations of matrimonial hucksters, of conquerors. The reincarnation was past anger, hatred, but it was past pity; secure in its sense of right and because it loved him, it had indicted him, heard his case and taken up the brief for the prosecution; then it had judged him by default and, after registering the judgment impersonally, it was about impersonally to take the necessary steps to execute the sentence.

Madame Duvernoy did not dally. She did not so much feel the need for urgency that she might have felt if she had in hot blood decided to go out and fight, as consider soberly that as she intended to act she must naturally act at once. There was no question of gaining or losing time; there was merely something to be done, something commonplace like paying the taxes or catching a train. Therefore, in the normal course she would do it. She gave her husband his instructions on the night of the scandalous affair. It would not be right to say that she laid proposals before him: she merely told him that she intended to take the steps he himself had suggested, to call the *conseil de famille* together, gain its agreement, and

then apply to the Courts for their assent. She would attend to the family; he, on the other hand, must see that everything was legally done.

"You're quite sure, Marthe," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "that you want to do this?"

"Quite," said Madame Duvernoy, as she slowly removed her hairpins.

"Hum! It'll be very unpleasant, very public."

Madame Duvernoy cast a cold glance towards her husband and reflected that he did not look his best in bed. His grey moustache hung into his mouth, and besides he was thin, hardly showed under the bedclothes.

"That is not our fault," she replied. "Besides, it will not affect us. Everybody will agree that we are only being prudent: as for Henri, anything is better than that."

"Perhaps; perhaps you are right. But what will Henri do? He may never speak to us again; he may revolt, sue for cancellation; he may bring our name into the Courts again."

"It's war," said Madame Duvernoy; "if he can beat us, good; if he cannot, good again. But I'm going to win."

If Madame Duvernoy had known it, what a friend she would have found in Letitia Javal!

"Well," said Monsieur Duvernoy, after a long silence, "I suppose you're right, Marthe. I suppose you're right. Of course you'll see to everything with the family. We haven't got much; there's your brother, of course, and Mademoiselle Ravier."

"And the Lacour girls."

"Marthe! How can you be so ridiculous. Why, those poor creatures won't dare to say a word."

"Quite so, Jules, they will say what I choose; that is enough."

Monsieur Duvernoy said no more. He was uncomfortably conscious of a conspiracy in which he played an ugly part. He was to lend himself to the quasi emasculation of his own son, to sign a paper practically drafted by his wife, together with Lacour, a disappointed rival legatee, with Mademoiselle Ravier, dependent and therefore venal, with the Lacour girls, those pale shadows of women. He was to stifle the memory of romance, to fake wrongs and scheme with legal friends to influence the judge. It was low. But then he thought of this money in Henri's hands, this money which should not have come straight to him, but passed first through those of his mother. Yes, old Mademoiselle Romain should have left it to Marthe, for her to hold while she had life and strength. If she had done that he would have had the handling of it; he would have been able to save it, increase it. The bitterness of it invaded him. He did not want to spend those three hundred thousand francs; he did not want even to spend the income: he wanted to save it, to swell the bundle of securities in his dépôt. It was intolerable to think that Henri might waste it. Besides, as he watched his wife he realised dimly that here was no emotional crisis that words might remedy: she was not hurrying as she unbuttoned her boots and brushed her hair. No, she had made up her mind. So Jules Duvernoy sighed as he reviewed the beastliness of the affair, ground his teeth a little when he thought of the lost money, and agreed.

Madame Duvernoy wasted no time. The next post carried to Algiers a lengthy letter to her younger

brother in which she asked him to fix a day, the earliest day he could, to come to Paris to settle this grave business. She recited the circumstances in detail, colouring them somewhat where required. She described Bernay as a rogue greater even than he was reputed to be, his wife as an intriguer, Suzanne as a young person who practised *le flirt*. She did not shrink from anything that might help. Suzanne's *flirts* she calmly represented as being on the undefinable border line which separates respectability from laxity; she traded upon Lacour's sense of importance by pointing out repeatedly that he was the head of the house of Lacour, and that this duty of his was also a privilege. The last sentence of her letter was masterly: ". . . And of course I have always felt uncomfortable about Henri's getting everything. It is quite true that Mademoiselle Romain was only our aunt by marriage; still, she was your aunt as well as mine, and I think it would have been fairer if Jacques and Julie had been left something too. Still, you know how things are: Henri has everything and Jacques and Julie nothing. Please answer soon."

Monsieur Lacour made no difficulties. Indeed, he entered into the conspiracy with the zest of a man to whom revenge is offered. It was intolerable, of course, that that fat gawky boy should have so completely cut out his son and daughter. Besides, as Marthe very sensibly said, he was the head of their house. He telegraphed with fine recklessness: it relieved him to telegraph instead of writing, as it would have relieved him to shout rather than to speak in ordinary tones. And the telegram bore secretly stamped on every word that he was ready for anything.

The capture of Mademoiselle Ravier and of the Lacour girls was also a simple feat, indeed a simpler, for Lacour might have rebelled against his sister's desire; he might have been chivalrous, or felt the stirrings of some *esprit de corps*, or merely thwarted her because he was angry and disappointed and wanted to annoy somebody. There was nothing of this kind to be expected from Mademoiselle Ravier: she was the pensioner of the Duvernoys and lived in fear of their displeasure; they represented the bare comforts of her declining years, and must therefore be placated at all costs. Besides, and this was quite as important, Mademoiselle Ravier respected her benefactors because they had money. Being rich, they could do no wrong. As for the Lacour girls, Madame Duvernoy wasted no thought on them, but merely told Mademoiselle Ravier to bring them with her when she called. In her spirit of thoroughness, Madame Duvernoy did not neglect any possible advantage. She received her poor relations in the drawing-room, dressed in her new blue *foulard* and wore most of her jewels. She even committed the solecism so rare among Frenchwomen of pinning on two brooches. But then one of the brooches was a mass of diamonds: it simply fascinated the Lacour spinsters, one of whom had no jewels save an amethyst brooch, while the other owned naught but a necklet of inferior coral beads.

The four women collected in the drawing-room on the hard black chairs, round the oval table on which was laid an excellent tea. The three spinsters sat very erect, their shoulders parallel to the stiff backs of the chairs, and watched their hostess with awed eyes as she poured out tea and graciously inquired whether

they wanted one lump of sugar or two. They all had two; they always had had two in her house, though they were content with one in their poor home in those hard days when sugar still cost fivepence a pound. Still, it pleased them to be asked; it increased the strangeness and imparted adventurousness to the rite.

"You will be wondering why I asked you to call," said Madame Duvernoy, after she had assured them that she was very well, and that Monsieur Duvernoy was very well, and that *ce cher Henri* was very well.

"Oh no, not at all," said Mademoiselle Ravier, whose colourless eyes kindled with curiosity. "It was charming of you, *ma chère Marthe*."

"Charming," repeated the daring elder Lacour girl, while her younger sister ventured to smile as does the November sun.

"There was a reason," said Madame Duvernoy. "I am very worried about Henri."

Occasionally interrupted by warm expressions of approval from Mademoiselle Ravier, Madame Duvernoy told her tale. She warmed to it as she went on, depicted in crude colours Henri's infatuation, his surliness, his lack of respect for her, exaggerated his obstinate attitude. And all that for that girl!

"*C'est terrible*," said Mademoiselle Ravier. She was deliciously excited; her colourless eyes glowed, her thin hands clenched so tight that the knuckles showed red. The two Lacour spinsters said nothing, but sat with their eyes fixed on the red felt carpet. They had nothing to say, these two women of uncertain age; their faces had no colour and their eyes no lustre; their lips were pale and their hair was tightly

drawn, so that their insignificant features appeared almost significant in their ugliness. No man would ever press their bony idle hands, nor cast an encircling arm round their high shoulders, but still there they were, women, and as women wonderfully stirred. In another twenty years they would be like Mademoiselle Ravier, women no longer except in evil-wishing; and they thrilled at the thought of this handsome, pink-faced, red-moustached Henri who embarrassed them because he was a man. They wanted to say something for him and his love, but what could they say? Nobody would listen. So they looked at their own bony hands, at the red carpet, and said nothing.

"But," said Madame Duvernoy portentously, "that is not the worst." She stopped, to emphasise the effect, smoothed the blue *foulard*, and on her ample bust threw out the brooches. "He is spending his legacy."

"Oh!" cried Mademoiselle Ravier. She stopped, genuinely horror-struck. For some seconds there was silence; the Lacour spinsters sat with downcast eyes.

"He is," said Madame Duvernoy. She related the terrible events of the past weeks, the purchases of clothes, the taxis, the theatres, hinted at gambling and . . . drink.

"Drink," groaned Mademoiselle Ravier. She was French: she could forgive the usual forms of debauchery, brutality, gambling, forgery, murder, but not drink.

And then Madame Duvernoy sprang upon her hearers the story of the diamond necklace, and demanded their presence at the *conseil de famille* to curb the madman.

"*Oui, oui, ma chère Marthe,*" cried Mademoiselle Ravier, "you are right. It is the only thing to do. You must save him from himself. Who would have thought it! Such a *charmant jeune homme*! Ah, what are we coming to?"

"To what indeed!" murmured Madame Duvernoy.

"Of course," said Mademoiselle Ravier, "a young man must amuse himself, but one must draw the line somewhere. It is unpleasant to do this, but you must face the inevitable. You see, all things have an end. Oh, it is a dreadful thing: money does not bring happiness, does it, *ma chère Marthe*?"

"No, it does not," sighed Madame Duvernoy. "Well, we are agreed, I will tell you the day. And, of course, not a word. I do not want Henri to know, because . . ."

"Of course it would . . ."

"Yes, it would . . ."

The two women wondered what "it would," and then deciding that everybody must see what "it would," brushed the phrase aside.

Then a terrible little thing happened. The elder Lacour girl suddenly raised her pale eyes, opened her thin mouth and, clenching very hard those bony hands, faltered—

"But *ma cousine* . . ."

She stopped, already full of fear, unable to utter the passionate prayer for pity which was shaking her poor thin body. The pale eyes roved helplessly to the Récamier couch, the loaded chiffonier. Nothing came, the spring was dry, but she was to be punished all the same.

"What? What do you say?" shouted Madame Duvernoy.

"What? What do you say?" hissed the sedulous Mademoiselle Ravier.

The elder Lacour girl said nothing, merely shrank away as if she feared a blow. She had tried, tried, she had so valiantly dragged herself into battle, and now she could not fight. Tears flooded her unsteady eyes.

"Understood," said Madame Duvernoy, "you will do what I tell you."

"Yes," said Mademoiselle Ravier, "you shall." And then jocularly: "One might think it was you he was after."

Oh, the misery of all this; the younger Lacour girl laughed as the lash flicked out across her sister's heart: she thought it policy to do so.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

ENCHAÎNÉ

I

THE *conseil* gathered round the dining-room table, covered for the occasion by a faded green cloth. A histrionic instinct had moved Madame Duvernoy to substitute it for the ordinary flowered tablecloth, for in France a green tablecloth means business. A green cloth lies on the table when the *maire* marries you, when the examiner examines you, when you appear before the court-martial or the assessors of taxes : if the French have anything to do with it there will be a green tablecloth about on the Day of Judgment. Madame Duvernoy had neglected nothing to make the occasion solemn. She had collected four inkpots and pens and paper for everybody, though it was not clear that anybody would want to make notes except her brother, who was to act as secretary ; his place was magnificently marked by a brand-new writing-pad bought at the Louvre for one franc ninety-five, a decanter of water on the right, a tumbler on the left. She would gladly have piled by the side of the writing-pad the Talmud and the Korán, as well as the *Manuel de Procédure Civile*, which was to guide the debate, for all laws were useful to one who wanted to repress anarchy, but she had to be content with the *Manuel*, for she possessed no other

legal treatises. Still, it all looked very well and significant; the room had gained in severity by the regular arrangement round the table of the colonnaded chairs.

Monsieur Duvernoy sat with his back to the side-board, with the younger Lacour girl on his right and Mademoiselle Ravier on his left. Madame Duvernoy faced him so as to have her brother on her left and the elder Lacour girl, that potential danger, under the cross-fire of her eyes and those of Mademoiselle Ravier. The men wore frock-coats and maintained an air of preoccupation; Madame Duvernoy was finely gowned in grey silk and again wore many diamonds, while Mademoiselle Ravier, all excited trembles and short-sighted peerings, had for the occasion bought in some *dépôt* of dead fashions a bonnet which nobly kept up the traditions of 1875. The Lacour girls, neutral in colour and neutrally clothed, seemed to have drawn their hair tighter than usual; their bony hands lay listless on the green tablecloth as if their owners had no interest in the proceedings, but the reddened eyelids of the elder girl showed that she had wept that day. Still, she was present and no doubt would do her duty, do as she was told.

The little clock struck three. Monsieur Duvernoy threw a hurried glance at the languishing shepherdess and her marquis, cleared his throat, hurriedly brushed up his grey moustache.

"Ahem! It is three o'clock."

"It is three o'clock," said Lacour, "it is time to begin." The gay blue eyes rolled pleasantly in the Algerian's brown face, but there was no smile on the thin lips.

"Yes," said Monsieur Duvernoy. "Ahem! Well . . . I . . . we have called you together in *conseil de famille*, to consider . . . a situation of great gravity. My son Henri, whom you all know, gave us for many years every satisfaction, but for the last three years he has been under the sway of a . . . of an . . ."

"Of an attachment," suggested Madame Duvernoy.

"Yes, of an attachment which . . . thanks to which . . . well, of an attachment which we think disastrous."

"Oh yes, a terrible attachment," said Mademoiselle Ravier in an animated tone, "youth is so imprudent."

"As you say, *ma tante*," said Monsieur Duvernoy, "youth is imprudent, but we who have experience must save it from itself."

"*Très bien*," murmured Lacour, as he made a note.

Monsieur Duvernoy warmed to his subject. His little thin hands fluttered, his eyes flashed and his moustache seemed to bristle as he recited the intolerable treatment to which he had been subjected for three and a half years; he represented Henri as surly, insolent, systematically disobedient.

"No discipline," said Mademoiselle Ravier, very resolute.

"Yes, he cares for nobody," said the Algerian, with fine confidence, given that he had not seen Henri for three years.

Madame Duvernoy took up the thread. She, too, had a soul full of grievances; her son had flouted her authority, disregarded her wishes, tried to break her heart.

"Yes," she cried, with sincere pathos, as the plénitudes of her bust passionately surged, "he is a bad

son. And, as for that girl, she is bad, bad. She is an adventuress, she is not respectable . . . she has been brought up à l'anglaise."

"Ah, *ma chère Marthe*, how different things were when we were young," said Mademoiselle Ravier, "time flies."

"Yes," said Monsieur Duvernoy, hurriedly diverting his aunt from a favourite course, "it would be better if things did not change. But they do, and the result is that my son has fallen into the hands of rogues and that if we do not help him he will be ruined."

There was some slight discussion, if discussion it could be called, when all but the elder Lacour girl were of one mind. The spinster sat silent in her faded dark dress on which feebly flaunted the amethyst brooch. Her face was like wax and as inexpressive, for all feeling seemed to have flown to those pathetic knuckly hands which nervously quivered on the green cloth. When the chorus of abuse had somewhat subsided, Monsieur Duvernoy attacked the second and graver count of the indictment.

"This is not all. Serious though this be there is another question before us. It is the primary reason . . . well, I should hardly say the primary reason, but it has so much to do with the other. . . ." Monsieur Duvernoy was entangling himself. He waved his hands ineffectually as he tried to explain without exposing too brutally the secret basis of the *conseil*.

"My husband means," Madame Duvernoy suddenly interposed with terrible sharpness as she fixed her eyes on the dim silver shapes behind the blue curtains of the sideboard, "that it is because Henri has in-

herited a small fortune that these people agree to the marriage. If we can remove it from his control they will assuredly drive him away and he will be safe. Oh, I know these people: they love nothing but money."

"Quite true," said Mademoiselle Ravier, "and yet, neither gold nor wealth make us truly happy." She sighed, and then turned a fierce eye on the elder Lacour girl. The spinster shifted under the heavy gaze; it goaded rather than quelled her; she felt that something within her was striving to escape. It was that awful stunted hope that is like nothing so much as a dwarf Japanese tree that strives to break its torturing pot. It was love and romance and ideals, all these starved things that will not die but burst forth into flower even at the thought of dew. A gust of passion seized the elder Lacour girl as she thought of this beautiful couple pitted against this gang of money-grubbers, these people with hearts full of gall: Lacour the disappointed legatee, Madame Duvernoy the tyrant, her husband the dry-as-dust, Mademoiselle Ravier her own gaoler. She must speak, she ought to speak, but above all she must. She found her knees quivering, her temples moist. Then she was speaking, first in a mumble and then more clearly but in tones foreign to her usual speech.

"I . . . I want to say this. . . . Perhaps it is not so bad as you think; this girl, I have not seen her . . . still, Henri, Henri . . ." She seemed to shrink from an unaccustomed word, but blood rose in her pale cheeks and she tore the rest of the sentence from her reluctant throat. ". . . still, Henri loves her. Oh, don't make an enemy of him . . . don't make him unhappy . . . life isn't so very good . . . we

haven't so long to live . . . he has tried so hard you say, he has asked you so often, he has fought so hard . . . fought so hard. . . . Let him be happy even if you think he is wrong, let him be happy for a little rather than be unhappy for ever. . . ."

"Henriette," shouted Mademoiselle Ravier, but the rebel would not be silenced. She spoke louder, faster, gabbled under the calm and discerning eyes of Lacour, the hot weight of Madame Duvernoy's black gaze.

". . . He's young and he won't always be young . . . let him be happy . . . let him have what he wants . . . never mind money . . . what does money matter? what does character matter? what does anything matter when one is in love . . . oh, don't hurt him—don't, don't, don't."

Then the elder Lacour girl burst into heavy weeping, the tears rolled between the knuckly fingers, her throat was full of horrid muffled chokings.

"Henriette," shouted Mademoiselle Ravier again as she seized the spinster by the arm and shook her. "Silence, do you hear? silence. You are ridiculous . . . you are *mal élevée*. The idea of behaving like this."

"Hysterical," said Madame Duvernoy, as she shrugged her heavy shoulders.

"*Pauvre fille*," sneered Monsieur Duvernoy, "*toujours sentimentale*."

Lacour laughed and, after a pause, a slavish giggle issued from the lips of the younger Lacour girl.

At length the spinster's sobs became less violent. She dabbed blindly at her eyes with a large coarse handkerchief and ceased to cry, ceased to show signs of agitation beyond the quick heaves of her flat chest.

"This incident, this ridiculous incident being over,"

said Monsieur Duvernoy, elaborately casual as he brushed up his grey moustache, "I will now tell you the end. Since he has been in the hands of these people Henri has been led into extravagance, formidable extravagance. From the first day onwards he has thrown his money about like . . . like . . . Well, he has thrown his money about, bought, I think, eight suits in one month. . . ."

"Taken taxis every day," said Madame Duvernoy.

"With the *Métropolitain* at his door!" said Mademoiselle Ravier, full of horror.

"He has wasted his money on finery, ties, canes, on theatres and music-halls and . . . debauchery. . . ."

"He is being ruined," said Lacour in duly shocked tones.

"Yes . . . and to crown all . . ."

"Henriette," hissed Mademoiselle Ravier, "stop that snuffling."

"To crown all he has bought for that girl a diamond necklace. . . ."

"A diamond necklace," whispered the younger Lacour girl. Her eyes glowed fiercely as she fingered her coral beads.

"Yes, a diamond necklace, worth at least twenty thousand francs."

Madame Duvernoy glared at the sideboard, her brother nervously drummed on the table with his fingers as he thought of those twenty wasted bank-notes; Mademoiselle Ravier exchanged with the younger Lacour girl a bitter glance that was friendly in its mutual spirit. But Henriette Lacour sat stiff and broken: she had forgotten the terrific, unheard-of extravagance, and now it had fallen on her and crushed her. Twenty thousand francs! It meant no

more and no less than a million, for she had no money. But it was awful, incredible.

"Therefore," said Monsieur Duvernoy in the histrionic style of the French Bar, "I ask you to sign the *procès-verbal* requiring that a *conseil judiciaire* be appointed by the Courts to take charge of my son's affairs."

After another silence all burst into speech. There were cries of *abominable* and *terrible*. There were clamours from Mademoiselle Ravier; the younger Lacour girl ejaculated the word *discipline*, for she was in the majority and gained boldness. Henriette Lacour did not move, did not protest. She was beaten. Meanwhile Monsieur Duvernoy handed Lacour the *procès-verbal*, for the Jedburgh judge had written it out in advance.

"Friends, friends," cried the Algerian gaily, "a little silence." His blue eyes glowed in his handsome brown face; his voice rang brazen and triumphant as he read the document. "*Voilà*. There is nothing to do but sign. I will sign last. Now, Jules."

Monsieur Duvernoy signed illegibly with a great flourish; then the younger Lacour girl carefully wrote her name in fine Italian writing; Madame Duvernoy seized the pen and signed so angrily that "Marthe" read like "Marie." Mademoiselle Ravier signed, coquetting with her flourish and the dot over the "i." Then she laid the paper before Henriette. The spinster looked at it miserably, keeping her bony hands clasped together.

"Henriette," said Mademoiselle Ravier, "sign."

The spinster did not move, but a sound escaped her throat. The silence laden with glances weighed

heavy on her crushed soul. She nerved herself to refuse, to jump up, to cry out that she would not sign, but she raised her eyes, saw Lacour and Monsieur Duvernoy mocking, Madame Duvernoy and her sister so hard and resolute. With a trembling hand she took up the pen.

"Here," said Mademoiselle Ravier, peering at the paper. She put her hand on Henriette's shoulder, pressing upon it with her lean fingers; an awful psychic force seemed to pass from her into the body of her victim. Henriette Lacour's face worked, but she dipped the pen into the ink. She looked helplessly at all those hostile faces; then, with a faint but desperate shrug and a heavy sigh, traced her name.

"Ouf!" said Lacour, as the tension relaxed, and quickly signed.

There was a sudden sharp sound. Henriette Lacour had fallen face on the table as she fainted. Along the green cloth, at the end of her long gaunt arm, lay the bony hand with the red knuckles.

II

"Well," said Madame Duvernoy, "that is over and finished. Oh, I am so glad."

"Glad, glad, so am I, but it is not finished yet."

"Not finished?" cried Madame Duvernoy, as she threw an anxious glance at her husband. "Oh, you mean you must get the approval of the Court? But that will be quite easy."

"I don't say we shall not get their approval. It will come up in the *Première Chambre* before President Mazul; he will do anything I like because he will

want me to get his son quartered in Paris in November when he begins his military service. I can arrange it through Colonel Chamino. Still, Henri may make trouble."

"Do you mean protest? What can he do?"

"He can defend himself; he can employ a barrister. Of course, we have the best chance with the *conseil de famille* behind us, but you can't say what a clever barrister might not do."

Madame Duvernoy did not speak for a moment, but her fine grey-clad bust heaved angrily. At last she burst out—

"Why didn't you tell me? What's the use of all this if you can't arrange matters? It's ridiculous, you're making me ridiculous. Oh, why must I go through all this?—my son is callous and my husband is as useful as . . . as . . ."

"*Voyons, Marthe,*" snarled Monsieur Duvernoy, giving a fierce twist to his moustache, "I pray you do not be absurd. What is the use of my telling you half the truth? Henri is entitled to defend himself, *que diable!* It is only common sense. Of course I will do everything I can, see Mazul, tell him to arrange it with his assessors. I don't think there will be a hitch, but you must look ahead."

"What is going to happen?" asked Madame Duvernoy.

"The case will be called in about three weeks. I can't manage it before; in the ordinary way it would be two months. Then . . ."

"Two months!" screamed Madame Duvernoy, "but . . ."

"I tell you I can arrange it with the *greffier*. It will be three weeks."

"Three weeks! But in three weeks . . . Jules, in three weeks, as soon as Henri hears about this . . . how do you know he won't marry the girl?"

The two looked at one another with serious frightened faces. Madame Duvernoy had the sensation that she was fighting for her son against the impenetrable stupidity of her husband.

"We should get a verdict if he did, certain," he mused.

"But, Jules, you are mad. What's the good of a verdict if he marries her? He'd be ruined . . . ruined. Oh, I can't, I won't bear it. . . . And I feel it, I feel it, he'll lose his head when he hears . . ."

"Well," snarled Monsieur Duvernoy, "he's got to hear. He'll be summoned to appear three days before the case comes on. I can't help the law, I didn't make it."

"Three days?"

"Yes, three days. Plenty of time to go to a barrister."

"Not so much time as three weeks."

"Well, I don't see that that matters much and . . ."

"Jules! Do you really mean to say he needn't hear till three days before? Do you really, really?"

"He needn't, if nobody tells him."

"Then," cried Madame Duvernoy, "then he will not know. You will say nothing nor will my brother, nor *la tante Ravier*. Oh, he will not know."

"What about Henriette?" said Monsieur Duvernoy nervously.

"Henriette . . . ah . . . oh, she wouldn't dare."

"She had some spirit to-day."

For a minute Madame Duvernoy faced this new danger, but soon she was ready to cope with it.

"We must get her out of the way!"

"Murder?" said Monsieur Duvernoy, with a smile.

"You are absurd. Let me give *la tante Ravier* a thousand francs and send them all three off to Nice for a month. To-night, send them off to-night. Once they are there I assure you your aunt will watch her! She won't even post a letter. Her sister will watch her too, if we give her something, stockings, new boots, anything. And at night they can lock her up."

"Marthe," said Monsieur Duvernoy, laughing now at his wife's bright eyes, "what a conspirator you would have made!"

"Do you agree?" Madame Duvernoy had no time to laugh.

"Well a thousand francs is a lot of money."

"Would you rather Henri married that girl?"

"No, of course not; well, it's not a bad idea. But Henri would still have three days."

"He can't marry in three days."

"No, but he can see a barrister. And perhaps he will when he reads the summons."

"When he . . . But . . . but, Jules, must he see it?"

"What do you mean? Of course he must. It'll be delivered him here personally by a *huissier*."

Madame Duvernoy looked at her husband with an air of dismay. Then, suddenly, her mouth relaxed into a smile.

"Jules," she said in a hoarse, excited voice, "will the *huissier* know him?"

"Know him? Of course not."

"Ah! Then listen . . . my brother is still here . . . ask him to stay here, and then . . ."

"Then?"

"You will send Henri away, find some business for him somewhere. Berquin will let him go. And . . . my brother will receive the summons."

"Impersonation?" shouted Monsieur Duvernoy. His legal soul was thrilled with horror. "But . . . but it's gaol if it's found out. And your brother won't do it."

"It won't be found out. Henri will realise what happened . . . but only after . . . and then he won't speak . . . he won't send you to gaol. Oh no, that's safe. And as for my brother . . ." Madame Duvernoy smiled harshly as she thought of the disappointed legatee, ". . . leave my brother to me."

"But Henri must have the summons."

"Yes, but only let him have it an hour before he has to appear. He won't realise . . . he'll be too surprised to say what happened . . . it'll knock him down . . . he won't be able to do anything."

Monsieur Duvernoy looked at her amazedly, then nodded several times. "That," he said at length, "is an idea."

III

Henri stood stupidly looking at the paper in his hand. He was summoned to appear as respondent at the *Première Chambre* of the *Palais de Justice* at ten o'clock that day. The *conseil de famille* required the Court to approve its decision that a *conseil judiciaire* should be appointed to deal with his affairs. The *conseil de famille*? What *conseil*? Why? What had he done? He struggled vainly with these questions for some minutes, and was conscious only of

an immense bewilderment. Apparently something had been going on behind his back, decisions had been taken; mysterious processes had worked, and alone their results were visible. He had the sense of a conspiracy, but it did not anger him: it left him disarmed rather, too amazed to protest and fight. He felt like a dog held by the scruff of its neck and helplessly dangled in the air by its master; he found himself stupid as is the animal when it rolls its eyes about but can do no more than wave its paws.

It was nine o'clock. He had had his chocolate in his bedroom and was preparing to leave for the *étude* when this thing fell across his path. He read it ten times perhaps, still bewildered, and without even debating as to what he should do. The door opened, and, quickly, with an air of preconceived and military attack his father and mother entered the room. They looked truculent in their outdoor clothes and yet abashed; there was colour in his mother's cheeks and nervousness in his father's hands.

"Come along, Henri," said Monsieur Duvernoy very jauntily, "it's a quarter-past nine. We've just got time enough. I've ordered a *fiacre*."

"Time?"

"Yes. You've had the summons, I suppose? We must be at the *Palais* at ten."

"But . . . but why . . .?"

"You should know," said Madame Duvernoy coldly, "you have been extravagant; steadily you are getting worse. You are to have a *conseil judiciaire*. The *conseil de famille* has decided."

The *conseil de famille*! The thing loomed immense in Henri's misty horizon. He had a vision of his relatives, his mother and father, his uncle Lacour,

Mademoiselle Ravier, his Lacour cousins, and Julie and Jacques and Mademoiselle Romain whose money had delivered him into his family's hands, and even further back the long dead grandfathers who had given him sweets, a grandmother, and other faded figures. It closed round him, it shrieked at him, and stifled him and pushed him and muzzled him; it cried out that it knew what was right, and that it was holding him, and that he'd better go quietly, for it was the family, the French family, France, the world force. He looked dully at the two representatives.

"It's for your good," said Madame Duvernoy with decision.

"*Allons*, hurry up," said Monsieur Duvernoy as he stormed the keep.

Soon the silent three, conquerors and prey, were jolting in the *fiacre* over the uneven wood blocks of the Champs Elysées.

IV

"Your name is Duvernoy, Henri?"

"*Oui, Monsieur le Président.*"

"Age twenty-eight. Old enough, I should say, not to stand before the Court in a case such as this." President Mazul portentously blew out his puffy cheeks as he delivered the rebuke. Henri, having nothing to say, realised him again as a little fat man with the reddest possible whiskers and a rotundity which his robes imperfectly concealed.

"Still," President Mazul pursued, "the Court has

heard the statements of your natural guardians, read the *procès-verbal* of the *conseil de famille* signed by every living member of your family."

"*Monsieur le Président*, I object," cried the barrister whom the Court had appointed on the spot when it found that Henri was undefended, "I understand that the signatory Lacour is married. There is no information as to the attitude of his children if any."

"There are two," said Monsieur Duvernoy, rising, "respectively aged fifteen and twelve."

"Your objection falls to the ground, *Maître Perrin*," said the President smoothly, "as these persons are minors. I repeat, therefore, young man, that the unanimous judgment of your family is against you. The catalogue of your extravagances is not, I must say in justice to you, unequalled in the annals of the Court: we are, I regret to think it, accustomed to deal with the gambling away of fortunes and their dissipation in shameless debauchery, neither of which is alleged against you. But it is alleged that you recently inherited a large sum, and that this has been followed by an immediate ebbing away of your moral force. It is stated that you have at once distinguished yourself by sartorial extravagance, that you have expended in two months more money on clothes than you formerly spent altogether in two years, notably that you have purchased eight suits of clothes in one month. Have you anything to say in reply?"

Henri's eyes concentrated for a second on the judge's red whiskers, then roved past the pale horse-faces of his two assessors. He surveyed the big white-washed hall, its oak benches and solemn red curtains,

the municipal guards at the door, the queer clean place where the crucifix had hung before the anti-clerical campaign. It did not inspire him; it dazed him to be there in a sense as a prisoner; it crushed him. He saw his father near him sitting rigid with folded arms, his mother, who that day looked as large in a severe black silk dress as if it had been white, for it was tight, and the brown bench threw out her form into relief. Both avoided his eyes, but Lacour, who sat with the public, boldly levelled at him a hot blue gaze.

"Well?" said President Mazul, "do you acknowledge this . . . this piece of ridiculous extravagance?"

Henri struggled to remember, but his mind refused to work. He could not recall having bought eight suits; still, he had bought a lot of clothes: no doubt they were right.

"*Oui, Monsieur le Président,*" he said dully.

"Ah!" President Mazul stooped intently forward, while his assessors whispered behind his back. "Then I presume that you also acknowledge having wasted large sums in the purchase of a number of useless articles, ties, canes, unnecessary boots, hats?"

"*Oui, Monsieur le Président.*" Yes, he had bought these things.

President Mazul lectured him at great length on the iniquity of waste; he upbraided him, charged him with folly, lack of respect for his parents. In the familiar style of French judges he prosecuted, angrily sweeping aside the timid objections of Maître Perrin, the helpless defender, who had had no brief, and whose questions to Henri had elicited nothing.

"*Enfin,*" cried President Mazul viciously, "you are charged with having defied the wishes of your parents,

purchased a costly diamond necklace for a young person whom they will not allow you to marry." There was a buzz of interest in the court. The assessors looked shocked; the public in the gallery, middle-aged *bourgeois*, idle young men and women, all wanted to see the rebel. He had not merely thrown a bomb, this ruddy young fellow with the golden moustache, or shot a rival, or done any of the normal things: he had flouted parental authority. The women looked at him with a mixture of admiration and fascinated horror, while the men frowned or enviously smiled at the romantic figure to whom Shinto meant nothing.

"Do you acknowledge this?" thundered President Mazul with trembling red whiskers.

"Yes."

"Do you acknowledge that your parents have forbidden this marriage?"

"Yes."

"Have they intimated that they might ever consent?"

"No."

"Have you any valid reason to urge for defying them?"

"No."

"Have you anything to say? You must understand that under these circumstances the Court will have no resource other than to call upon your counsel, who is hardly in a position to state your case."

Henri did not reply. He had nothing to say. His mind would not act; it suggested nothing to him, nothing to relieve him of the sense of guilt these coalescing forces were thrusting upon him. He stood horribly ashamed at the bar, convicted of crimes which

he himself had been trained to think grave, extravagance and contempt for parental authority. He was caught in the great social machinery of the family and the law, those interdependent and allied forces; they loomed before him, gigantic and awful, clad in their traditional rights. He could do nothing.

"*La parole est à Maître Perrin*," said President Mazul as he threw himself back in his arm-chair, blowing out his cheeks and stroking his red whiskers. He listened without interest, whispering to his assessors at times to demonstrate that the matter was already settled. It effectually was, for the unfortunate barrister, having neither brief nor verbal information, could not attack a single point of fact, challenge statements, demand the production of bills. All he could do was to throw himself upon the mercy of the Court, to ask for an adjournment.

"*Non, Maître Perrin*," said President Mazul sharply, "the Court knows all there is to know."

Maître Perrin struggled on bravely. He begged the Court to consider his client's youth, to recognise that follies such as these were inseparable from the sudden influx of wealth, but that they were transitory, and that the salutary lesson an appearance in court had taught his client would reduce his excesses to vanishing-point. The affair of the diamond necklace he tackled more carefully, for it was terribly complicated by the marriage question. If only there had been no marriage tangle! If only Henri had bought the necklace for some woman whom he obviously would not marry, all would have been well. But he wanted to marry against his parents' wishes, and this hung like a mill-stone round Maître Perrin's neck.

"I recognise the gravity of my client's position,"

he cried, "but again I plead youth and its uncertainties. I plead that all of us are apt to go astray and to flout the rule of those who love us . . ." Maître Perrin looked appealingly at the two inexorable figures at the side, ". . . but I do beg the Court to give my client an opportunity to redeem his position, to give him leave to express his contrition and to promise to make amends if only the decision be not adverse."

"He has had his opportunity," said President Mazul. He was in a hurry to make an end of the case; the young man had made no defence, denied nothing, promised nothing. He was a stupid and sullen young man. Besides, reflected President Mazul, Duvernoy was the only man he knew who could satisfactorily arrange that favour for his son: to keep his son with him while he fulfilled his military obligations was a big thing. He consulted his assessors; there was a nod from the one, a grunt from the other.

Henri left the court with his mother, the one dazed, the other grim, but both silent. Monsieur Duvernoy stayed, uneasily conscious of success. Henri was delivered into his hands; he was appointed *conseil judiciaire*, could now despotically administer his son's money, reduce his income to nil, hold him, dominate him as a father and a master.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

LA DÉBÂCLE

MADAME DUVERNOY nervously fussed about the big drawing-room. The histrionic sense, never quite absent even in the most poignant of French tragedies, had stood by her side as a gloomy usher, and rolled open for the crisis those doors which admit none but scheduled occurrences: birth, marriage, death, and the necessary impressing of the great. She walked hurriedly over the red felt carpet from white-and-gold wall to white-and-gold wall, disturbing as she went the happy order of the black-and-gold chairs; she lifted and laid down a cushion; she centred more accurately a Swiss cow-bell upon the chiffonier, and as she did these unnecessary things, thanks to which days of reckoning can sometimes be postponed, she watched the silent, bowed figure of her son in the arm-chair by the empty grate.

He sat in it loosely, with parted knees, and hands carried low and clasped, with unseeing eyes on the rug at his feet, and a droop in his heavy shoulders. He did not move his bent head, nor did he show that action would presently revivify him. He sat as if waiting for malignant fate to sling yet another stone at him, as if he had submitted to so much that submission was a habit. He sat in quiet expectation that the will of his house would soon reassert itself

and compel him, as it thought fit, to be active or quiescent, and an odd detached indifference was upon him. As she saw him sitting thus, abandoned in every line and with mysterious, averted eyes, an intolerable sense of pity and anger filled her, made her want to throw herself at his knees and beg for forgiveness, or to clasp him round the neck and comfort him, or even to stand before him and shake her fist in his face and tell him he was a bad son, but that now she held him fast. The conflict was so sharp that the impulses neutralised one another, and left her mind void of purpose; one thing only emerged: she must end this awful, silent companionship, thrust into the heavy atmosphere of mental inaction some purely material but distracting thing.

"Now, Henri," she said briskly, "you had better get ready; *le déjeuner* will be ready in ten minutes."

"I don't want any," said Henri. She was struck by the low pitch of his voice.

"Oh, don't be absurd. Of course you must have your lunch." It honestly angered her to think he might not be fed, for he was her responsibility, and she had a right to discharge it; she had done so for twenty-eight years.

"I don't want any," Henri repeated. He found that all his energies were mustered in resistance to this trifling pressure. Why should he eat if he did not want to?

Madame Duvernoy looked at him doubtfully, understanding very well that in his perturbed condition he would not want food. Still, she felt that she ought to press him.

"*Voyons, mon chéri,*" she pleaded, "you mustn't talk like that. Of course I know quite well you have

had trouble, excitement, to-day. Still, all that is over now. You must be philosophic. Life isn't always what we want it to be, so we must take it as it comes. You know how fond of you your father and I are; we . . . we only did everything for the best."

"Ah?" Henri looked up suddenly and fixed upon her eyes which seemed bluer and bigger than she had ever seen them. Rather, no, she had seen them like this once before, as a prelude to typhoid fever. They shocked her, frightened her.

"Yes," she said hurriedly, "of course . . . you know quite well . . . of course we wouldn't do anything else. . . . I can't expect you to see that quite . . . one doesn't at your age. After all, you know, things won't be so very dreadful. Everything will go on as it used to before all these things happened. We don't want to take your money away; we're not going to. It'll only mean that your father will take care of it and pay you the income . . . well, such income . . ."

"The income?" Though Henri was in a maze, the magic word stirred him . . . nationally.

"Yes . . . the income. It may not be much at first; not as much as it is now."

Henri looked at her with a stupidity that encouraged her, for his vacuous air betokened a weakness by favour of which she could tell him the truth.

"You see, Henri," she said guardedly, as she rubbed against each other the little plump hands that had grown rather moist, "we feel that, for a time—oh, only for a time—it would be better—better for you, you understand—if you did not receive anything besides what you make. You have been extravagant,

dreadfully extravagant. It would . . .” She ^{once} ~~she~~, if not looking at him now, but had fixed her eyes on the Corot (which was really a Trouillebert). “It would teach you economy. So your father will invest it in things—oh, quite good things, you know, like Panama bonds and shares, good shares; they will make you richer by and by, but for a time there will be no income.”

She breathed hard, having had her say, then stole a glance at him, to find the blue eyes staring at her fixedly. His head was quite erect now, and his shoulders were no longer bowed.

“Ah,” he said in a strained voice, “there will be no income?”

“No.”

“You mean I shall only have the three thousand francs I earn?”

“Yes . . . at least now . . . later on we will see. . . .”

“Why?”

Madame Duvernoy was nonplussed, but struck back with an old weapon. “To teach you economy.”

“Why?”

“Oh, don’t be absurd! You must be economical. Besides . . .”

“Besides what?”

“Well,” said Madame Duvernoy grudgingly, “we can’t quite trust you, you see. You might . . . you might do anything . . . spend a lot. . . .”

“What would it matter if I spent my income?”

“One must save. . . . Still, I don’t say . . . but it’s not only that . . . we can’t trust you . . . you might . . . Well, we thought that perhaps, now you had a fortune . . . Suzanne Bernay . . .”

back, Suzanne?" The name came with a sudden sharpness, and Madame Duvernoy saw with awful clarity that his suspicions were aroused. She must go on. And bravely she rushed into the fray. She had no more coward eyes now for the red felt carpet, the black-and-gold chairs, the chiffonier; she looked boldly into his face.

"Yes, Suzanne. We were afraid that you might forget what you owed us, that you might marry her against our wishes. I know you have a sense of duty, but one forgets that sometimes when one is rich. You see, with that big income you were a fine match; they would have held on to you; they love money, those people . . . it's your money they were after . . . but now, of course . . ."

"Now!" Henri shouted. He leapt to his feet, and his mother had a moment of terror as her son loomed enormous in front of her, fierce-eyed and red-faced. But she could have spared herself terror: he hardly saw her, for his mind was fully occupied with the struggle to realise the position. "Now!" he said in a lower voice. Then again: "Ah . . . I begin to see . . . you mean that she would have married me when I had a good income . . . but not now . . . now. . . . Ah, it's awful! I can't understand, believe. . . . *Maman*," he cried almost pitifully, "am I wrong? Do you mean that you've done this to part us?"

Madame Duvernoy stood before him silent and self-accused. There struggled through her complacency a faint sense of shame.

"Answer me," he said roughly; "is this a plot? Have you all schemed to deprive me of my income because you thought I'd marry her in the end?"

Because you thought you could hold me by force, if you couldn't hold me by respect? Answer me!" he shouted.

Madame Duvernoy looked at the angry face, and could say nothing. Her mind was absurdly busy with tiny things: his red moustache, the buttons on his rotund waistcoat. At last she nodded in assent. There was a long silence, during which she felt his gaze heavy upon her. At last he spoke, slow and harsh.

"You . . . you, my mother . . . you did not trust me to obey, so you've tied me up. You've taken my money . . . yes, you have," he cried fiercely, as she lifted a hand in protest. "You've taken my income from me because you thought that I wouldn't marry her on three thousand francs a year, and that I would on twelve. You thought she was after my money . . . she who's loved me for three years . . . loved me as you've never loved me. . . ."

"Henri!" Oh, she was paying!

"Yes . . . as you've never loved me. . . . What's all this? I see what it is: you've opened my eyes. . . . What's all this affection of yours? It's tyranny, it's cruelty, it's brutality. You have . . . dared to try and break me by taking my money . . . dared to insult Suzanne by suggesting that that's what she wants. . . . How dare you? How dare you?"

"You have no right to use the word 'dare' to me."

"You have no right to steal my money."

"How dare you speak to me like that?"

"Ah," Henri laughed savagely, "you, too, say 'dare' to me! It's in the family."

Madame Duvernoy felt tears come into her eyes at the gibe, but she drove them back and dragged herself

back to the battle. No surrender; it was a fight for power and a fight for love.

"It was for your good. . . ."

"For my good! *Oh, mon Dieu*, what do you know? How do you know what's good for me? How dare you judge for me? Ah, I know why: it's because you're used to being master, and master you want to be still. You've dictated as to what I should wear and what I should eat, and as to when I should play and work; and now you want to choose a wife for me, and keep me from the one I want. It's tyranny, that's all; it isn't love of me, it's love of power; it's selfishness, it's hardness, brutal hardness, stupidity."

"Henri!"

"Yes," he repeated, as understanding flooded his mind, "stupidity."

"How can you? You don't know the world. There are obligations I've got to think of, money. . . ."

"Money!" Henri brought his fist down to the small table. "Money again—your religion. Money's the thing that cursed us: money, I suppose, that made you marry my father; money that's made you stint and scrape; money that's prevented you from travelling, and forbidden hospitality, and forbidden theatres, books, happiness, life. It's money you dream of, and of people with money, and of getting more money, and marrying money, and money breeding money, money, money, more money. . . ."

"One must think of money," said Madame Duvernoy hotly, as she clenched the little hands, "in France. . . ."

"In France!" Henri interrupted, suddenly so clear-headed that he could see, see at last. "Speak of it,

your low country—a country of money-grubbers and peasants wallowing in the mud of their fields; a country where women are for sale and honour for hire, where art runs in the gold-strewn gutter, where people won't marry because marriage is dear, where they won't have children because children are dear, where justice is bought, and position is bought, and government is bought, and God Himself is bought . . . when there is a buyer. . . .”

“Henri! . . . I beg you . . . Henri! . . .”

“No, no; leave me alone. I see you as you are, you and the rest. All of you filthy with money, all of you ready to sacrifice for money father, son and husband. So that's what you call the family: a group of people leagued against the world to make money, and torturing one another to keep it . . . and that's what you call affection: a crafty scheme to maintain fortunes . . . and that's what you call duty: the obligation to obey the call of money when you express it . . . filial respect, all that, the claim of money in another form. . . .”

“Henri!”

“I've done with it: done with the family, done with affection; I've done with respect and obedience; I'm going to be happy in my own way; I'm going to be free. Yes, though maybe that I shall again be beaten by money in my new family . . . yes, in my new family.”

“She won't marry you now.”

“So you think; but perhaps she wants less money than you do. Ah, that strikes home? Yes, some of us don't want so much money; some of us believe in freedom and in love. You think there's no such thing, no hearts, no loves, only money . . . but

there's contempt for money, too. You've taught me that, you. . . . It's by loving money that you've made me understand money. . . . It's by making me a slave that you've made me understand liberty. . . . I'm free, free! You thought you had me in your hands, but you were wrong. I'm going, going, understand that, going for ever . . . it's liberty I want, and liberty I'll have. It's time I fought for it, and I've only to fight to get it. Yes, Letitia was right: fighting's the policy; fighting against convention, duty, affection, respect, all that sort of mildewed thing. It's fighting does it, and only fighting. It's fighting that makes one worthy, not lying down meekly in front of your cruelties, your lies. . . ."

Like a torrent the irreparable disruptive words flowed from Henri, as his torn heart belched forth the intolerable accumulated torments of those years. They came full of the acidity of fermenting wrongs. He stood, this little maddened figure, faced by the breaking down of his traditions, stripped of habit and without a prop. He struck at all that had been dear to him, all that he now hated, because he had loved it and found it false; in those minutes a gospel inspired him.

" . . . Fighting's the only duty: fighting against oppression and fighting against wrong; fighting like a locked-out dog that's beating at the door; fighting like a flower that's lost in stinging nettles. . . . It's fighting gives you muscles and a soul, just as it's peace that makes you soft, and a creature in the hands of the wicked. You've got to be strong against the strong, or they'll kill you; you've got to kill if you don't want to be killed. . . . Mother, father, country, all those things are words, things like shrouds they

wrap round you before you are dead. . . . But I've done with them, done with them; I'm flying from them because I know they'll die when they've no longer got souls to live on, poor brains to fuddle and enslave. Yes, I'm going, going for ever. . . ."

"Henri!"

". . . going. You thought that I would marry against your will. Well, I'm going to . . . the *huissier* will come to you, and if you consent I won't care—it's too late—and if you refuse it won't matter to me. It's by putting me into gaol that you've made me want to escape."

Madame Duvernoy looked dumbly on as Henri strode up and down, still shouting and shaking his fists. As he incoherently abused her, she realised that all was over; that she had lost him, that in a few minutes he would leave her alone in front of the empty grate. All was broken between them, and blood had become thin as water.

"That's all I've got to tell you," he said, with sudden calmness. "Good-bye."

He turned to go, and all of her passionately went out to him. But she did not plead: if she must die, she would die fighting; she threw severity into her voice.

"Come back."

"No," he said over his shoulder.

"Where are you going to?"

He turned, the handle of the door in his hand. He looked at the stout rigid figure in black for the last time, this woman who loved and tortured him, his blind, devoted, cruel mother. Though his purpose remained unshaken faint pity stole upon him. Too late!

"Where are you going to?" she asked breathlessly now.

The past was washed away, and she was alien to him: his voice was cold as if he spoke to a stranger—

"To her."

THE END

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